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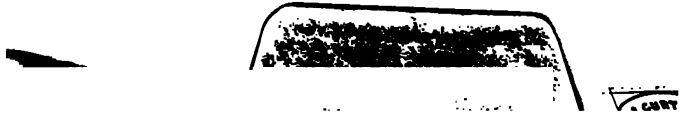

OUR NATIVE SONGSTERS.

BY ANNE PRATT,

AUTHOR OF "COMMON THINGS OF THE SEA-SIDE,"
"WILD FLOWERS," ETC.

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OUR NATIVE SONGSTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THRUSHES—BLACKBIRDS—FIELDFARE—REDWING—GOLDEN ORIOLE.

All nature is full of music. Gentle winds whisper it as they rustle through the summer leaves; and the autumnal gale wakens louder and wilder melodies as it bows down the branches of the forest trees. The trickling waterfall and the pattering rain-drops are musical; and rippling streams and dashing waves send forth sweet or grand harmonies. All inanimate nature seems pouring forth its anthem from earth to heaven.

But if this is the case with flowing waters and careering winds, how is it more especially so with utterances which convey the inward feeling. How musical are the tones of the human voice, not alone when expressed in song, but when used to

tell of gentle emotion, to soothe or to persuade; or when, raised into powerful energy, they flow in torrents of eloquence. And the singing of birds, how sweet is it to the listening ear! These joyous creatures seem made to render the woodland, or the quiet meadow, or the stream side, a scene of repose and recreation from the toils and cares of human life. The beautiful description of Spring given by the sacred writer, is as applicable to our country as to Palestine. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time for the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." We listen to the song with wonder. We know that no human instrument can attain the compass of that strain, or catch the tones of that sweet, but irregular melody; that were we to measure our vocal powers with those of the little bird, our voice would be lost in the woodland, which echoes far and near with his music. Like all the sounds of Nature, it has its variations, telling sometimes of joy and gladness, and anon seeming, as it is uttered in the minor key, so plaintive and tender, that we can only compare it to the wailing wind, or to the touching lament of

human sorrow. It is well, if, while listening to the woodland minstrels, we can find ourselves carried away for awhile from earthly thoughts and memories, and can feel as did the good Isaac Walton. He who looked with such delight on green fields, was gladdened, too, by the song of the birds. "The nightingale," he says, "another of my airy creatures, breathes such sweet, loud musicke out of her instrumental throat, that it might make mankind to think miracles are not ceased. He, that at midnight, when the very labourer sleeps securely, should hear, as I have, very often, the clear airs, the sweet descants, the natural rising and falling, the doubling and redoubling of her voice, might well be lifted up above earth, and say, Lord, what musicke hast thou provided for the saints in heaven, when thou affordest bad men such musicke on earth!"

Among our native birds there are none which have greater powers of song than the Merulidæ, or Thrush tribe, and they are, too, among our earliest singers. The common thrush (*Turdus musicus*) may often be heard singing on a clear day in February, and its song, which acquires greater strength and fulness as the spring advances, is

continued, at intervals, till July.* A very sweet song it is, and one heard by all who live in the country; for the thrush is found everywhere in our woods, and often builds its nest by our very doors, rearing its young in the holly, or arbutus, of the garden, or among the ivy-leaves which screen the house wall. But this song is heard to best advantage when a number of thrushes sing in the evening together, among the trees, when the chorus is so rich and melodious, that all must listen to it with delight. Although the song always partakes of the same character, yet it is sufficiently different in individuals, for a good musical ear to detect the singing of some one favourite thrush, which may, year after year, build in the same place. Often, too, it seems to articulate words quite distinctly. Thus, Mr. Broderip mentions one which, in the course of its singing, expressed sounds which fell on the ear as if it were repeating the words, "My dear—my pretty dear—my pretty little dear"—which sounds were

* The Song-thrush is about nine inches in length. The whole upper parts are dark brown; the throat, sides, and breast, pale yellowish orange; the chin and the belly are white; the whole lower parts marked with triangular spots of dark brown, arranged in chains; the beak and feet are pale brown.

heard by others as well as himself. Mr. Knapp, too, listened to one which frequented a copse, and which after a certain round of tune, "trilled out most regularly some notes that conveyed so clearly the words 'Lady-bird! lady-bird!' that every one marked the resemblance. He survived the winter," adds the naturalist, "and in the ensuing spring, 'Lady-bird! lady-bird!' was still the burden of our evening song; it then ceased, and we never heard this pretty modulation more. Though merely an occasional strain, yet I have noticed it elsewhere—it thus appearing to be a favourite utterance."

We do not wonder, as we hearken to the thrush's song, that it should always be a favourite one with the poet and the lover of nature. Chaucer, who, as has been remarked, "seems of all poets to have been the fondest of the singing of birds," and who was entranced by them as they sang from the green leaves "with the voice of angels," seems to have delighted in that of our early bird, when he compared the human voice to its music:—

"Swote his tongue as the throstle's note."

Graham, too, has well described both bird and minstrelsy:—

"The Thrush's song
Is varied as his plumes; and as his plumes
Blend beauteous, each with each, so run his notes
Smoothly, with many a happy rise and fall.
How prettily upon his parded breast
The vividly contrasting tints unite
To please the admiring eye; so loud and soft,
And high and low, all in his notes combine
In alternation sweet to charm the ear."

The French term the thrushes, *les Grives*, from *grivé*, speckled, because of their mottled breast. Our song-thrush, however, is the Mavis of the Scotch, and the Singdrossel of the Germans, the Throstle of our English poets, and the small Missel-thrush of some ornithologists. It is sometimes kept in cages for its song, and this may often be heard far off, as it comes sounding through the busy street, when perched on high, at some window, the thrush carols his morning lay. It is said to live for six or eight years in a cage. Perchance its song may soothe some one to whom on the sick couch it brings a tune of green woods. Perchance, to some mechanic, who toils in the busy city, it bears a memory of early days, passed in the country, when he can no longer wander to hear it among the green boughs. From such we

would not withhold it; yet surely the caged bird, made as it was with wings to fly, may claim some pity as we remember how all its natural impulses must lead it to yearn for the green shadows, the ready wing, and the notes of its old companions.

Happily for our native thrushes, however, they may sing on, without danger of being seized to contribute to the luxurious diet of the epicure. Several birds of the thrush family are much in request on the Continent for food. The Italians sell them in their markets, and highly prize them, at the period when, having eaten figs and grapes, their flesh is said to be very highly flavoured. Thrushes are very plentiful, during the vintage season, on the southern coast of the Baltic. Klein, who observes that there are, probably, more snares laid for these birds than for any others, mentions that the city of Dantzic alone consumes, every year, eighty thousand pairs of thrushes. It has been observed, in countries where they feed upon grapes, that, during the season at which the fruits are ripe, the thrushes are easily taken, having perhaps become inactive through repletion.

The common song-thrush was, doubtless, one of

the species which were regarded by the Romans as the choicest of feathered game; and many a sweet chorus of song in the trees of the Roman villas and gardens led to the capture of the singers. Extensive aviaries were formed around the ancient city, in which thrushes, blackbirds, fieldfares, redwings, and other birds of this family, were kept during the whole year, that they might be prepared for the table. A vaulted pavilion formed the aviary; this was furnished with perches. A carpet was made of green turfs, often renewed, and branches were strewed over the floor. Here, crowded together in great numbers, the birds were well fed; and, lest some wandering wing might be seen, and thus awaken a longing for the green wood, the windows were so placed as that the little captives might receive light without a sight of the blue sky or the surrounding country. A clear rivulet ran through the aviary, in order to gratify their love of bathing; and here the petted birds sang and ate till they were fitted to gratify the taste of the luxurious Roman. It may be, that the epicure justified his appetite for singing birds on the ground of the invigorating nature of the flesh of the

thrushes; for their writers tell of its power to strengthen the frame; adding, that if eaten to excess, it could not injure. Horace, as well as other poets, praises the diet.

As we might infer from the early singing of the thrush, it is an early builder. It usually begins its nest in March, and by the end of April, or the beginning of May, the first brood is ready to leave the nest. Although the thrush seems to have little notion of protecting itself during the winter from the cold, as it usually roosts, with other small birds, in the open hedges, yet it well knows how to shield its eggs and young from the bitter winds of the early spring-time. The nest, which is composed externally of moss and fine roots, has a compact inner surface, lined with a coating of cow-dung and decayed wood, so ingeniously worked in together, as that it will even hold water. This structure is usually placed in some low bush, as the honey-suckle or hawthorn, or in one of the garden evergreens, and contains four or five eggs, of a pale blue ground, with small spots of black. Every schoolboy knows the thrush's eggs, for they may be seen continually strung and hung up in the farm-house

or cottage, save where the old superstition yet lingers, that if they are kept over Sunday, the housewife will rue it in her broken crockery. So little fear of man has the thrush, that it sometimes builds in places where its nest cannot fail to be seen by the inmates of the house; and instances are known in which the little dwelling has been made in outbuildings where workmen have been daily employed.

Every one who has a garden has good reason to welcome the thrush there, not for its song only, but for its active services. It is true that this bird will not scruple to help itself to the ripest cherry, or to the finest gooseberry on the bough, but on the other hand, no bird is more skilful in ridding the garden of the snails and slugs, which destroy alike the loveliest flowers, and the finest fruits. All the thrushes, as well as the blackbird, make great havoc among the snails; but the missel-thrush, like the blackbird, is not nearly so skilful in shelling them as is the common thrush: and it is said, by Mr. Blyth, to commence its operations by endeavouring to pull the snail from its shell. This it finds difficult, and it is at last obliged to break the shell as well as it can, so that, as this

writer observes, "a song-thrush will devour five or six snails before a blackbird can swallow one." The season in which they consume the greatest number of these animals is in winter, after a night or two of severe weather, when the ground is crisp and hard with frost, and is glittering in the sun-beam, as if strewed with diamonds. A writer in the Magazine of Natural History, says, "In winter, after a night or two sharply frosty, with just a sprinkling of snow on the ground, it is pleasing to stroll beside hedgerows, and see the Turdi* starting in and out on the face of the hedge-banks, and between the base of the stems of the hedges, in search of snails. If you proceed slowly, a smart reiterated tapping, not loud, but obvious, is heard at uncertain intervals, as the Turdi may find their prey; this they break, not wherever found, but on some stone, fixed firmly, with one face exposed in the bank-side, and, I think, station themselves below the stone. I have, in my vocabulary, called such stones chosen of the thrushes, the thrushes' chopping-blocks." The same writer observes, that the thrushes also consume a great number of snails during July and

* The generic name of the thrushes and blackbirds.

August, when they explore hedge-rows, orchards, and gardens, with great vigilance. At this season, he remarks that they do not usually break the shell in pieces, but peck a hole through the last and larger coil. In summer, as well as during winter, numerous pieces of snail-shell may be found strewed about in gardens, the remnants of the thrushes' meals. The song-thrush, too, has been seen to break the shell against a barrow, when a large stone was not quite near. It will also feed on the earthworm, and it is amusing to watch a number of these birds, hopping about singly, popping the head forward with the motion peculiar to them of three jumps, and seizing their prey, which they swallow whole. They are also very partial to the beautiful scarlet berries that, during autumn, cluster on the boughs of the mountain-ash.

The thrush remains with us all the year, receiving great accessions at the autumnal season, from numbers which come from the north, with the fieldfares and redwings. They do not fly in flocks, but are generally found near together. Even in winter their sweet songs may be heard; and a throstle has been heard to sing on Christmas-

Day, while its song is truly the herald of spring; for, even before a violet has peeped forth, it is becoming frequent in every wood. Calder Campbell, in an unpublished poem, describes its early singing among the trees.

"A taste of winter in the murky town
Drove me to seek for shelter in the fields,
But leafless trees, and pastures damp and brown,
Gave little promise of what spring-tide yields.

"The lanes were rugged for the want of leaves,
And green things saw I not, save one alone,
The generous ivy, that o'er bareness weaves
Its graceful wreath to cover tree and stone.

"Yet winter had expired: where yesterday
Keen snow-drift powder'd every way-side thing,
The balmy dew gleam'd in the sun's glad ray,
To scatter pearls where red-tipp'd woodbines cling.

"It is the spring! for, lo! unfolded yet—
Where pale-green buds peep from the elm-tree boughs,
And where rich sulphur-tinted flowers are set
Around the slight stalks of the first primrose.

"It is the spring! I hear her first glad song!
I see her earliest bird, the speckled thrush!
His descant rich swells sweet yet loud along,
And makes a vocal bower of every bush.

"Oh, welcome Spring! oh, welcome vernal flowers!
Oh, welcomer than all, the merry bird
Whose warbling music—earnest of bright hours
Is the first hymn to Spring by wandering poet heard."

The thrush, though not so endearing to man when in captivity, as are many caged songsters, yet is not wanting in love to its kind. The parent birds both share in the work of incubation, and are very assiduous in the care of their young. Mr. Knapp mentions an instance of thoughtful care in a thrush which is very interesting. "We observed, this summer," says this writer, "two common thrushes frequenting the shrubs on the green in our garden. From the slenderness of their forms, and the freshness of their plumage, we pronounced them to be birds of the preceding summer. There was an association and friendship between them that called our attention to their actions. One of them seemed ailing, or feeble from some bodily accident; for though it hopped about, yet it appeared unable to obtain sufficiency of food. Its companion, an active sprightly bird, would frequently bring it worms or bruised snails, when they mutually partook of the banquet: and the ailing bird would wait patiently, understand the actions, expect the assistance of the other, and advance from his asylum upon its approach. This procedure was continued for some days; but after a time, we missed the fostered bird, which,

probably, died, or by reason of its weakness met with some fatal accident."

The thrush is very fond of bathing, and when the morning sun gilds the clear rivulet, the bird goes down to the water, luxuriating in its delights; and often several wild thrushes may be seen thus commencing the day in company. Bechstein remarks that it is at the borders of streams that the fowlers catch them most readily. In some cases they employ a tame bird, which runs and flutters on the banks of the water, and serves as a decoy to the wild thrushes. He observes that the fowlers should be in no haste to take them, for that the thrushes like to bathe together to the number of ten or twelve at once; and no sooner has a thrush found a bath to its liking, than it begins the call which assembles its companions. It would seem that the sight of the bath gives the bird great joy, for it utters the cry of "Sik, sik, sik, siki, tsac tsac tscac," which is immediately responded to by many voices of gladness. The thrushes, however, seem to be very cautious in their proceedings, for they seldom venture into the water until the more courageous robin redbreast has already tried it; though, no sooner has

one thrush commenced the ablution, than the rest follow, quarrelling among themselves if the stream is narrow, or so filled up with water-plants as not to afford space for the accommodation of the whole party.

Our song-thrush inhabits every country in Europe, frequenting gardens and woods near streams or meadows. It is the Petite Grive of the French: the Tordo Bottaccio of the Italians; and the Aderyn tronfraith of the ancient British. Clare alludes to it by the name of Mavis.

"The Mavis Thrush with wild delight,
Upon the orchard's dripping tree,
Mutters, to see the day so bright,
Fragments of young Hope's poesy;
And oft Dame stops her buzzing wheel,
To hear the Robin's note once more,
Who tootles, while he pecks his meal,
From sweet-briar hips behind the door."

Mr. Waterton considers that the bird referred to by David in the 102d Psalm, was a species of thrush. The comparison is familiar to us all, in which the Psalmist, after describing by various poetic and touching images the depth of his sorrow and loneliness, added, "I watch and am as a

sparrow alone upon the house-top." The Hebrew word which our translators have here rendered "sparrow," includes many insectivorous and fruit-eating birds, and among them, all the thrushes of Europe. It is most unlikely that the sparrow should have been intended in the passage, because, as every observer of nature knows, no bird is more social in its habits than the house-sparrow; and though it may be seen in numbers sitting on the house-top, yet one rarely sees a lonely sparrow there. Mr. Waterton, who had pondered on this, has concluded that the bird alluded to is the *Passer solitarius,* in English "the solitary sparrow," and in Italian *Passera solitaria,* which he says is a "real thrush in size, in shape, in habit, and in song, with this difference, that it is remarkable throughout all the East for sitting solitary on the habitations of man."

"The first time," says this writer, "that I ever saw this lonely plaintive songster, was in going to hear mass in the magnificent church of the Jesuits, at Rome. The dawn was just appearing, and the bird passed over my head, in its transit from the roof of the Palace Odescalchi, to the belfry of the church of the twelve apostles, singing as it

planted within us, and to which He has tuned the rich symphonies of Nature.

It is in the winter woods, and when sunshine succeeds to some days of bad weather, that we hear the sweetest notes of the missel-thrush* (*Turdus viscivorus*). The song is not peculiar to winter or early spring, but is sung nearly throughout the year. Perched on the very summit of the gnarled oak, or on the taller elm, the loud plaintive tones are carolled vigorously. Sometimes the strain seems to consist of three or four notes, incessantly repeated, nor is it ever very varied; but there are seasons when it is rich and clear, and it is then often mistaken for the tones of the blackbird. When the song is loudest and harshest, it is regarded as an indication of approaching rough weather; hence the bird is called storm-cock in some country places, and its presage is relied on as surely by the countrymen, as that of the mist on the mountain, which

* The Missel-thrush is eleven inches in length. The head and upper parts are deep brown; the wings and tail umber-brown; the whole under parts yellowish white, thickly studded with black spots, of which those on the throat and breast are triangular, and those on the belly and sides are round; the beak and feet are brown, the former darker than the latter; the tail is slightly forked.

SMALL THRUSH.

would tell to the mountaineer of coming rains. That admirable observer of Nature, Bishop Mant, has well described the variations of the song.

> "But hark! from top of loftiest beech
> The Missel-cock's untuneful screech;
> Not like the rich and varied note
> Melodious from the Throstle's throat,
> But a distinct discordant scream,
> As if for day's departing beam
> To mourn, or with sad presage meet
> The embryo storm of rain and sleet:
> More tuneful when he takes his stand
> 'Mid the warm sunshine, where at hand
> On hawthorn, elm, or maple grow
> The boughs of pale green mistletoe,
> And plucks its yellow flowers, or feeds
> On the dark ivy's berried seeds:
> And sure I ne'er have heard a song
> More clear, more full, more rich, more strong.
> Though mix'd at times with harsher note,
> Than issued from his evening throat,
> What time I've seen the breezes blow
> His form all heedless to and fro,
> And heard him, as beneath I stood,
> Pour forth his music's changeful flood."

The French call this bird *La Draine*, and the Germans the *Misteldrossel*, like ourselves naming it from the Misseltoe, on which it so often feeds. Much of the dispersion of this plant is owing to the thrush; for the berries after being swallowed,

are often left in a fit state for germination on the fruit-trees, where this handsome parasite soon grows with a goodly bough. Nor is the plant confined to fruit-trees, for it may be seen also on the thorn, maple, poplar, hazel, lime or ash, and sometimes, though very rarely, on the oak. It is very ornamental with its pale green leaves and pearly berries to our woods in winter, but in many parts of the continent, as in France, it is much larger, and indeed almost covers the trees on which it springs. The berries constitute a good portion of the food of our bird; but the missel-thrush eats also those of the ivy, holly, or yew, besides various insects, worms, slugs, and snails. It is not a great depredator of our gardens, though it sometimes eats a few cherries and rasp-berries; and the fruits of the mountain ash are invariably borne away, if these songsters are to be found in their neighbourhood.

Mudie remarks that there is in our familiar appellation, a sort of double naming in the plants and the birds. Thus the latter is called missel-thrush, because it missels (soils) its toes with the slime of the berry; while the name of the misseltoe refers to its soiling the toes of the bird.

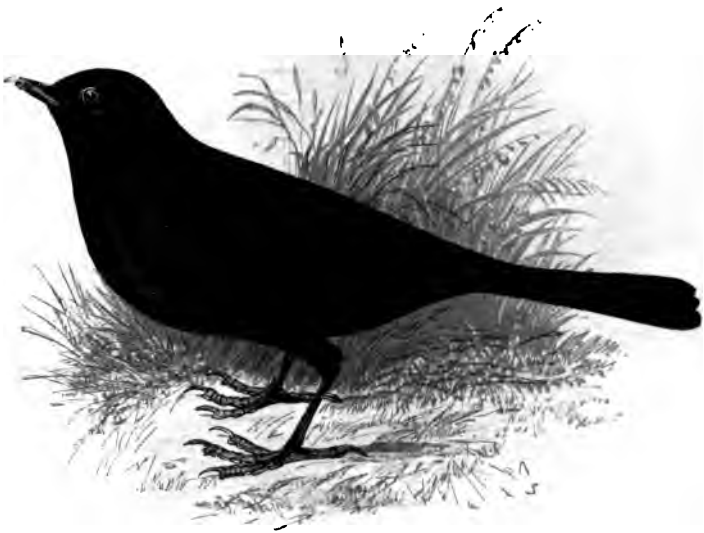
All the sweet singing of our woods is performed by small birds, for to large birds have been denied the powers of song. The missel-thrush is not only the largest of its genus, but is also the largest of all our songsters. It is a very bold, quarrelsome bird, but like some warm-tempered persons, it is not destitute of the affectionate feelings which win our regard. Thus Gilbert White remarks: "It is, while breeding, fierce and pugnacious, driving such birds as approach its nest with great fury to a distance. The Welsh call it *Penn-clywn*, the head or master of the coppice. He suffers no magpie, jay, or blackbird to enter the garden where he haunts, and is for the time a good guard to newly sown legumes. In general, he is very successful in the defence of his family; but once I observed in my garden, that several magpies came, determined to storm the nest of a missel-thrush: the parents defended their mansion with great vigour, and fought resolutely, *pro aris et focis;* but numbers at last prevailed; they tore the nest to pieces, and swallowed the young alive."

These magpies are cruel enemies of many of the smaller birds, and in spring, seem to keep up perpetual warfare with the thrushes. Thus Mr.

might observe it; sometimes, however, the little builder exerts much ingenuity in finding such materials for the outer portion of the nest, as might mislead by their similarity to the branch on which it is placed.

The missel-thrush is usually a wild and wary bird, shunning the dwellings of man, though, during the period of incubation, it seems fearless of all danger. It is not uncommon in any part of our island, but is not anywhere so plentiful a bird as is the common thrush. During the months of August and September, the missel-thrúshes seem to assemble in numbers, but they are not migratory birds.

Who has not paused in his ramble through the woods on some bright warm spring day, to listen to the mellow notes of the Blackbird? (*Turdus merula.*) Perchance we have taken shelter beneath the boughs on which the delicate green leaves are daily becoming larger and more numerous, from the shower which alternates with the sunshine, and then as the gleams of the sun come forth again to render that foliage of brightest emerald hue, the blackbird sings its welcome in the sweetest strains. An April day suits it well, for it revels in the



slight moisture which passing showers communicate to the atmosphere. The song is little varied, but so mellow, so flute-like are its tones, that few who are used to the country, have failed to listen with delight. It is one of the earliest songs of spring, too, and beginning on some fine day of February, it fails not all the summer through, save at the period of moulting. We cannot, while the blackbird is singing, see its jetty plumes, for it chooses for its place of song the thickest and most leafy part of the woodland. Could we have entered that wood when the morning sun was gradually gilding each leaf and bud with its earliest ays, we should have heard the loud greeting of the blackbird, like a psalm of thankfulness, for renewed sunshine.

At evening too, just when the shadows of the trees are lengthening on the ground, and all the landscape is assuming the faint grey tints of twilight, that blackbird's evening chaunt may tell to us the praises of its Maker. An approaching footstep disturbs the bird, and the sharp shrill cry which is then uttered, may be the sound of sorrow or of anger. The bird is, when wild, more subtle and distrustful than the song-

thrush, and yet it can be tamed more easily when in captivity. Its powers of song render it a favourite cage bird, but its notes are never so sweet as in the green haunts which it loves so well, for they are too loud for a room, and are sometimes a sad annoyance in a neighbourhood where early rising is not practised, and when the glad morning song arouses the sleeper. But the pet blackbird may be taught to whistle many a little air, and is so good a mimic, that it can not only learn the notes of other birds, but is said by Dr. Latham to imitate the human voice. It has also been known to crow like a cock, and cackle like a hen, apparently enjoying the sound of the responses made by the fowls of the neighbouring farmyards.

We need not describe the bird so well known by its dark plumes, more black than even those of the raven, and its yellow bill, and yellow streaks around the eyes. The female bird, however, differs in colour, and the black plumage has a brownish hue, which on the chest passes into brown. White birds of this species are to be met with, and a naturalist who found one, to avoid the anomaly, calls it a white yellow bill.

The blackbird is, during winter, mostly a soli-

ird, living in woods, hedges, and thickets; oes it appear that we have many accessions se birds from the north. It makes its nest arch or April, in large gardens, or thick s, or bushes of evergreen, frequently taking tage of the dark green ivy, which, at this eason, offers a secure covert from wind and and which, during the early spring, has d in its dark berries, so good a supply of The nest is composed externally of fibres, and small twigs; while a thick coating of orms an inner wall, which is well lined with rass. The eggs, which are four or five in er, are of a dull bluish green, with darker es. Bishop Mant describes this structure, ced,

"The overarching boughs between
Of some selected evergreen,
Of laurel thick, or branching fir,
Or bed of pleasant lavender,
To lodge secure their pendent home
A well wove frame, with moisten'd loam
Within cemented; and without
Rough but compactly, all about
With moss and fibrous roots entwined,
And wither'd bent grass softly lined,
Where may repose, in season due,
Their pregnant balls of chalky blue,
Besprent about the flatten'd crown
With pallid spots of chestnut brown."

Snails and slugs, worms and insects, are the food of the blackbird, accompanied by a vegetable diet of grapes, cherries, currants, gooseberries, and the berries of the ivy, the holly, and the mountain ash. It must be admitted that these birds sometimes commit great ravages in the fruits of the orchards and gardens, but they more than compensate for this by their services in destroying snails and insects. Every one accustomed to observe grass lands knows how terribly these are sometimes injured by the larva of the common cockchafer, that insect which, in its perfected condition, often flies against us with its loud humming in our evening walks of May and June, and which is familiarly called the Oak-web. The grub of this insect remains for four years in a larva state, and will sometimes destroy the turf of whole acres of meadow land, feasting also upon the roots of corn, and when in great numbers, proving a sad pest to the agriculturist. Rooks are known to be great destroyers of this insect, following the ploughman in his course, and picking up the prey which the instrument may dislodge from the soil. Nor is the blackbird useless in ridding the land of cockchafers. The Rev. W. T. Bree communicated a fact of this sort to the Magazine of

Natural History, which forms a proof of their usefulness to man. "In the month of August last," says this gentleman, "I was struck with the rather unusually large assemblage of blackbirds which frequented my garden; eight or ten were frequently to be seen together; and one morning I counted thirteen at the same time, hopping about, and chattering on the grass plot before the house. Their visits were usually paid about eight o'clock in the morning, and continued to arrest my attention for perhaps ten days or a fortnight. The birds directed their operations more especially to particular spots on the grass plot, which they stacked up with their bills, till the turf, which changed colour, and was supposed to be dying, became almost bare in patches, and was quite disfigured by the refuse of grass &c. which was left littered on the surface. Indeed, such was the rough and unsightly appearance which the grass plot presented in consequence, that hints were even thrown out that the blackbirds ought to be destroyed; for they had been repeatedly seen in the very act of disfiguring the turf, and the whole mischief was of course, from first to last attributed to them. Suspecting what might be the object of the bird's

the chorus of birds shall greet our ears. The wind sweeps gently over the wild flowers which crown the rocky crag, and the rivulets which run among the mountains are sparkling with diamonds, and melodious with the whisperings of the wind among the rushes, and with the trickling of its waters on the green mosses. The moorland spreads for miles away on the landscape, and wide hilly tracts are sprinkled with the furze, which is already golden, here and there, with the blossoms of spring. It is in such places that at this season the wild shy Ring Ouzel* (*Turdus torquatus*) resorts to place its nest in some secluded spot. It has come from some warmer climate, and perchance since it was here last summer, it has seen the sandy soil of Africa, gay with its brilliant flowers, and passed over the sunny south, whose dales and hills are brighter than those of our island. But it would not linger there, but has come to the rocky moors of colder lands to rear

* The Ring Ouzel is eleven inches in length. The general plumage is black, with a broad crescent of white across the breast; the black feathers are generally margined with grey, most broadly on the wings; the beak is yellow at the base and black at the tip: the feet are blackish. The female is coloured like the male, but the hues are less pure.

MERLE DU CAP.

its young. The ring ouzel, however, is not with us a common bird, though more frequent in our northern and western counties than elsewhere. It is well known in some parts of Devonshire, is a bird of the Peak of Derbyshire, and in Scotland resorts to the Grampian Hills. We could wish that it were more generally distributed, for its song is said to be very sweet. The bird, which is often seen in Norway, Mr. Hewitson describes as frequenting many of the wooded rocks of that country, and enlivening the most bleak and desolate islands with its sweet song. He says that it shares with the redwing the name of nightingale, and often delighted him in his midnight rambles. In France it is called the mountain blackbird, and it is in some of our counties known as the white-breasted blackbird. It has been thus by a poet contrasted with the blackbird, which it is much like in form and habits, only that it never chooses for its haunt the inclosed and inhabited districts.

> "From stone to stone the ouzel flits along,
> Startling the linnet from the hawthorn bough:
> While on the elm-tree, overshadowing deep
> The low-roof'd cottage white, the blackbird sits
> Cheerily hymning the awaken'd year."

The ring ouzel places its nest near the stream, sometimes sheltered by a bank, or by some clump of large foliage; but often the wanderer over the moorland may see it scarcely hidden by the branches of the ling, or lying quite exposed to view, among the heather bells or roseate heath. The form and materials of this little structure are similar to those of the blackbird, and the eggs, too, resemble, both in size and colour, those of our early songster. Bechstein says that its voice is sweeter than that of our favourite, though some notes are hoarser and deeper; but few naturalists agree with him, and it is by others compared to that of the missel-thrush. The bird sings usually from the top of some crag or stone.

The food of the ring ouzel consists of snails, insects, hawthorn berries, and various fruits; and when it first returns to us in spring, it eats many ivy berries. During autumn it sometimes comes to gardens for the fruit, and about the end of October it is seen along our southern coasts in flocks of from twenty to thirty, ready for its departure. Mr. Yarrell thinks that these birds cross the Channel to France and Spain, and thence to Africa, where they pass the winter; while he

considers that flocks from the eastern counties probably cross to Germany. It differs from other thrushes in this peculiarity, that it is as fat in the spring as in the autumn, while they, as well as most small birds, are very lean in the early season.

The male ring ouzel is a very spirited bird, and Mr. Thompson relates an anecdote which proves it to be ready to attack, even when there would seem no excuse for its pugnacity. This gentleman was walking in Crow-glen, near Belfast, with a pointer dog in advance, when two male ring ouzels rushed wildly screaming around the dog, at a few inches from his head. The dog seemed perplexed as to what he should do, and gave many an earnest and pleading look at his master, as if for advice in the difficulty. Finding this useless, he at length ran up to him; but the fearless birds, no way discouraged by the presence of the narrator and his two companions, followed, and flew so near that they might have struck them with their hands. "At the beginning of the onset," says this writer, "a female bird appeared as if inciting the males forward, and remained so long as they were attaining the highest pitch of violence, and then, like

another heroine, retired to another eminence to be 'spectatress of the fray.' Had they been a pair of birds protecting their young, or assuming similar artifice to the lapwing in withdrawing attention from their nest,—in which the ring ouzel is said to be an adept,—the circumstance would perhaps be unworthy of notice; but they were both male birds in adult plumage. The chase of the dog was continued a considerable way down the glen, and for fully fifteen or twenty minutes."

But the deep secluded glen, where the stream rushes rapidly through the water-flowers and grasses, or dashes over the stones or against the rocks, in its course watering the green mosses which cover them into a richer greenness; the quiet nook of earth, where the smoke rarely rises against the blue sky, is a home for another species of ouzel, one which is more frequent too, the Water Ouzel, or Dipper* (*Cinclus aquaticus*). Even in the dreary season, when the trees are bare of

* The Dipper is about seven inches in length. The head and neck are umber-brown; the rest of the upper parts and lower belly nearly black; chin and throat white, merging into chestnut-brown on the breast: the beak and feet dark brown.

leaf or bud, when the ground is crisp with frost, and the streams are flowing beyond their bounds from the large quantity of snow which has fallen into them, even then the song of the water ouzel is strong, rapid, and sweet, often continuing for three or four minutes, and sounding through the clear air like a voice of spring from the depths of winter. In some of our northern counties, where these birds are frequent, it would be difficult to pursue the course of any stony rivulet for a mile or two, without seeing several of them flying in pairs a little way onward; then stopping by the side of the rivulet, and singing the sweet and varied song. It is among the earliest strains of spring; it is sung even at Christmas. It greets the wanderer among the voices of summer, is heard late in the autumn, and is not even silent when night draws the curtain of repose on almost all our singing birds. Those who have heard it very often have compared it to the song of the wren in its execution, though differing materially in not having the loud shrillness of the wren's strain; but possessing instead a certain subdued and warbling richness. Never is it sweeter than on a frosty morning of January.

Strange stories were formerly narrated of this dipper; telling how, in violation of all the laws of gravity, which ordain that things lighter than the water shall float to its surface, this bird has been enabled to sink beneath it and walk for a long space upon the ground. But this fable has had to yield to more accurate observation, and the lover of the marvellous must content himself now with knowing that the dipper can plunge suddenly into the depth, rise again at some distance from the spot, plunge in again right merrily, and sinking and emerging, again and again, seem no way ruffled in spirits or plumage by the performance. He generally commences his diving from a rock, slanting a little way from the surface, either placed in the stream or at its side, and having first looked eagerly into the blue beneath him, he boldly seeks the depth, and pursues his prey where our eye cannot follow the movement. Even the half-fledged nestlings will, if alarmed, take to the water, as to their proper element, and learn to dive before they can learn to fly. Their food lies in the rivers and streams, and the larva of many an aquatic insect, which lies there awaiting till Time shall have gifted it with gauzy and

golden wings to hover over the pool, forms a meal to the dipper. The caddis worm, which moves along at the bottom of the pool, in its case of woody fragments, and which, if left unharmed, will float over the stream as the light May-fly, supplies our bird with many a feast; and in his diving he seizes the tiny and beautiful stickleback, from the shoals which float in our lakes and streams, and which country people call barn-stickles, because of their prickly spines; while the little minnows find no escape from his skilful wing and quick-seeing eye.

Mr. Macgillivray has told us by what means the dipper moves under the water, and says, that in reality it flies, extending its wing precisely as it would do were the air the element in which it was moving. Its body usually slants downwards, and the bird evidently has to use considerable exertion to keep itself at the bottom of the water. He remarks that in some instances, when he has clearly seen its motions there, it appeared to tumble about in a singular manner, its head inclining downwards, as if it were pecking at something, while both legs and wings were actively employed. It was at this time, apparently, in the

act of seizing its food. He adds that its structure is not fitted for walking below the surface, for its short legs and long curved claws are most unsuited to the act of running, though well adapted for effecting a steady footing on the slippery stones which lie under or above the water. The dipper consumes a great quantity of fishes' spawn, particularly of that of the salmon, while the little shell-fish which lie in such numbers about the stems and foliage of water-plants become its prey, and are easily seized by it, whether floating near the surface or lying in winter torpidity. Neither cold nor frost deters this hardy bird from dipping in the stream, into which he will plunge in winter from a large piece of ice, and from this habit most probably it derives its name. The Germans call it *Wasserschwätzer*, the French, *Merle d'eau*, and the Italians, *Tordo del aqua*. It is a resident bird in our country, and is not unfrequent in the north and west of England, nor in Scotland, though it is seldom seen in the counties near London.

The plants which grow so luxuriantly in our waters, giving the spots where streams run a great appearance of richness and beauty, are used by this water-blackbird in making its nest. This

is a very singular structure, often as large as a man's hat, more or less semicircular in form, with a firm sloping roof, made of moss, or water-plants, beneath which, as if under eaves, and completely hidden, is an aperture just large enough to admit the passage of the bird. The commodious and domed chamber within is lined with withered oak-leaves; and five beautiful eggs, of clear snowy white, are deposited there.

The water ouzel's nest is built early in the year, and the first family are ready for flight by the beginning of May. The nest is so well hidden, in some cases, that it could never be discovered, did not the chirping of the nestlings betray its site, or the flight of the parent birds, as they pass to and from their younglings with food, mark the haunt. Often it is placed in some crevice of the rock, or bank, which overhangs the water, and occasionally it is concealed among the stones at the side. A writer in the "Magazine of Natural History" remarks:—"Once I found a water ouzel's nest among some slender boughs, overhanging a stream; and once beneath a waterfall, at a point where the rock retreated a little in the middle; the water falling in a sheet just over

the nest, and forming, as it were, a crystal veil to it. Indeed, the eaves of the nest (as I call them) were always dripping wet, whereas the oak lining within remained always perfectly dry. The art with which this nest was accommodated to its situation was consummate." Mr. Thompson mentions a pair of water ouzels, which frequented a shade erected over a large mill-wheel, of forty feet diameter. It was supposed that they had a nest there, though it could not be discovered; but he adds, that the appearance of these birds often caused surprise, as they emerged from the dark and gloomy abode, between the arms of this gigantic wheel, which was almost constantly in motion.

That beautiful bird, the Rose Ouzel* (*Pastor roseus*), now and then appears in our island, though too rarely to deserve anything more than a passing notice among our singing birds. Few have heard its notes in our land. Mr. Broderip remarks of it:—"The song of this species appears

* The Rose Ouzel is eight inches and a half in length. The whole head and neck, the wings, and the tail, are black with a blue gloss; the whole middle part of the body, both above and below, rose-pink; beak and feet yellowish: the head is adorned with a fine falling crest.

to be peculiar. A wounded bird, shot from a flock by a sportsman near Meiningen, in Suabia, was soon healed and tamed by the kindness of M. von Wachter, the rector of Frickenhausen; and it began to sing. Bechstein relates, that its warbling consisted, at first, of only a few harsh sounds, pretty well connected; but this in time became more smooth and clear. A connoisseur who had heard the bird without seeing it, thought he was listening to a concert of two starlings, two goldfinches, and perhaps a siskin; and when he saw that it was a single bird that made this music, he could not conceive how it all came from the same throat. One of these birds is now in the aviary of the Zoological Society in the Regent's Park."

This bird is called the Pastor Ouzel, because, like the starling, it is often seen in company with sheep and cattle. It is the locust-bird of the east, and is much cherished there, as it destroys the locusts, so often a scourge to the vegetation of oriental countries. The Arabs term it *Smurmur*, in imitation of its note. In India these birds are very numerous, darkening the air at the season

when the bread-corn is ripening. In Dukhun, during the month of December, forty or fifty are said, by Colonel Sykes, to be killed at a shot. At this season they are very destructive to the crops, and commit scarcely less ravages than the locusts, which at other times they are so useful in destroying.

Far more common is another migratory visitant of the thrush tribe—the Fieldfare* (*Turdus pilaris*)—which comes to our island with the redwing for the winter, and reaches us just as our other migratory birds are taking their departure. The Rev. W. T. Bree observes, that he had heard an old sportsman say, that the samewind which brought the swallows, took the woodcocks away; and adds, "I have heard an intelligent countryman remark, alluding to the fieldfares and redwings in the spring, that there would be no warm weather till those birds had done chattering." Sometimes the common thrushes are observed to congregate with the small parties

* The Fieldfare is ten inches in length. The upper parts in general are ash-grey, but the back and wings are umber-brown and the tail is blackish: chin and throat fine yellow; breast reddish-brown; belly white; the throat and breast, and the crown of the head, spotted with black: the beak and feet brown.

FIELDFARE.

of fieldfares, which are in company together. Clare thus notices these birds:—

> "The hedger's toils oft scare the doves that browze
> The chocolate berries on the ivy boughs;
> Or flocking fieldfares, speckled like the thrush,
> Picking the berry from the hawthorn bush,
> That come and go on winter's chilling wing,
> And seem to have no sympathy with spring."

In some years, when these birds have arrived here by the end of September, the snow having lain long on the ground, they have cleared off all the ivy-berries in the neighbourhood, eating them unripened, and before they were as large as a pea. In milder seasons, the fieldfares spread themselves in flocks over the fallow-lands and pastures, hunting for the slugs and worms, which they seem to prefer to the berries, to which they resort when these animals cannot be procured. These thrushes remain with us usually till about the coming back of the swallow; but they have been seen and heard sometimes as late as the middle of May. The nest has been found, though very rarely, both in England and Scotland. Their summer quarters are the countries at the north of Europe; and they stay throughout the year in Poland, Prussia, and Austria.

They may be heard with the redwings, previously to their departure, all chirping together; but little harmony exists in this noisy concert.

The call-note of the fieldfare is unmusical, but its song is soft and melodious, though Bechstein thinks otherwise; for he says it is a harsh and disagreeable warble. Many persons, however, like its strains when in confinement, and it is easily tamed. A still sweeter song belongs to the Redwing* (*Turdus iliacus*); and it is heard sometimes in this country, before the bird takes its spring departure. This bird is called the nightingale of Norway; but its song, apparently, does not acquire perfection in this land. Here it hardly sings it out, but runs over its modulations in low and gentle tones, as if afraid of pouring forth all its joys, or as if practising against the season of song, though the voice seems no better in May than it was in January. Mr. Blyth, writing of this bird in the month of March, says,—"A day or

* The Redwing is less than nine inches in length. The whole upper parts are dark brown; whole under parts impure white, tinged with brown on the breast and flanks, and studded with chains of triangular blackish spots: the sides of the body and the inner surfaces of the wings are of a fine pale red; a streak of pale brown passes over each eye: beak black; feet pale brown.

;wo ago, I think I heard one in its full perfection. [t did not see me, and it was alone, away from ts companions, and piping forth with the utmost glee and spirit. Its notes were low and soft, some of them very sweet; and it now and then introduced a few that were loud and pleasing; but altogether its song is by no means equalled to that of the mavis. The redwing, in short, is not a bird worth confining for the mere sake of its music."

The smaller birds, in general, acquire each season their song by degrees, though this is less he case with the thrush tribe than with any ther; as the missel-thrush and mavis sing as udly and fully in November as in March; and e flute-like tones of the blackbird are as melious amid the cold winds of early spring, as in warm and pleasant month of April. Young ds of the singing species may, however, be rd practising their song even before leaving nest. This practising is by bird-fanciers d recording, apparently from the musical ument formerly in use in England, termed order, *which is thought* to have been a kind e, *and may have been* used to teach young

birds to form notes. "I have known," says the Hon. Daines Barrington, "instances of birds beginning to record when they were not a month old. This first essay does not seem to have the least rudiments of the future song; but, as the bird grows older and stronger, one may begin to perceive what the nestling is aiming at. Whilst the scholar is thus endeavouring to form his song, when he is once sure of a passage, he commonly raises his tone, which he drops again when he is not equal to what he is attempting; just as a singer raises his voice, when he not only recollects certain parts of a tune with precision, but knows that he can execute them. What the nestling is not thus thoroughly master of, he hurries over, lowering his tone, as if he did not wish to be heard, and could not yet satisfy himself. A young bird commonly continues to record for ten or eleven months, when he is able to execute every part of his song, which afterwards continues fixed, and is scarcely ever altered. When the bird is thus become perfect in his lesson, he is said to sing his song round, or in all its varieties of passages, which he connects together, and executes without a pause."

A similar practice may be observed in autumn, among older birds. During the season of moulting, the woods are silent, for no song is uttered by the birds which sang so sweetly on those boughs in spring. Several of our birds, however, recommence singing when this moulting is over. Thus, the robin's autumnal note is one of the first tones to remind us that winter is on its way to us; and the wren and the goldfinch have a strain for the fading year. At this time, before these birds arrive at their full song, they may be heard warbling their low prelude, as a singer might do to prepare her voice for louder strains of music. The chaffinch will sometimes practise thus for several weeks before attaining its former perfection; and the nightingale thus tries for a long time to model the notes of its rich strain before it can produce the full degree of compass and brilliance. This practising does not seem to arise from any forgetfulness of the song, but from a want of flexibility in the organs of the voice, owing to long disuse.

But we must return to the redwing, which, besides its song, has a very loud call-note, seeming as if it uttered a cry of "tan, tan, kan, kan," a

sound which, in woods where foxes abound, is said to serve as a notice of its presence to that animal, when Reynard will follow it a long distance through the wood. The food of this bird usually consists of snails, slugs, worms, and soft insects. When these cannot be procured, it feeds on the ivy and other berries; but it is probable that many of the redwings perish in winter, not from the cold, but from hunger. When an early gleam of sunshine awakes the insect world before their time, this bird seems truly to hail with delight the season of food and brightness.

> "Flowers peep, trees bud, boughs tremble, rivers run,
> The redwing saith it is a glorious morn."

Our bird is much like the common thrush. It chiefly frequents parks and shrubberies, and has been seen and heard as late as the month of May, in Surrey, Essex, and Yorkshire; while White of Selborne heard it in his neighbourhood as late as June, in a season which had been unusually backward and cold. The redwing has been known to make its nest occasionally in Middlesex and Surrey. But these were evidently exceptions to the general rule, and the bird usually wings its way

to northern climates to rear its young, and to sing there the "sweet wild song," which it is described as singing in Norway.

The soft flute-like notes of the Golden Oriole* (*Oriolus galbula*), are now and then heard in our orchards, for this bird is an occasional visitor to Britain. With the exception of the Bohemian Wax-wing, it is the most beautiful of all the birds which find their way into this country, and it is so richly coloured, that one would believe it to be a native of those tropical lands where birds and insects and flowers are so much more gorgeous than with us. It is not uncommon in Germany, Holland, and France, and is very numerous in Spain, Provence, and Italy, dwelling in secluded groves, and in the borders of forests, during the summer months, and departing in the autumn into Africa and the warmer regions of Asia.

A very sweet song is that of the golden oriole;

* The Golden Oriole is nine inches and a half in length. The ɜneral plumage brilliant yellow, with the wings and tail black, ıd a black stripe on each side of the face; beak orange-brown; ıt lead colour. The female is greenish yellow, streaked with rk brown.

and it has been likened to the sounding of various words by those who listened to it. The French call the bird *Père Loriot*, and some say that its song clearly articulates the words Oriot or Loriot. French ornithologists go further still, and detect in its notes the words *Compère Loriot* (Gossip Loriot); others say, that it cries "*Louisat bonnes merises*," (Louisat good black cherries;) and others have arrived at the very climax of fancy, and detect very decidedly, "*C'est le compère Loriot qui mange les cérises, et laisse le noyau.*" (It is the gossip Loriot who eats the cherries, and leaves the kernel.) The notes "Yo, yo, yo," are certainly repeated in its song, and Bechstein says, that the call-note of the bird is well expressed by the words "Ye puhlo." It can imitate tones not natural to it. Thus, the last-named writer mentions two golden orioles reared from the nest, one of which, in addition to its own song, whistled a minuet, while the other imitated a flourish of trumpets. It is a very distrustful bird, and not easily reared in captivity, rarely living more than three or four months in a cage.

The food of the oriole consists of insects and berries, and it makes some havoc among cherries,

which seem to be its favourite fruit. Its singular nest is generally hung in a fork of a bough, being usually attached firmly to both branches. It contains four or five white eggs, tinged with purple. The French have a saying that it is an ill omen to find an oriole's nest.

These birds display great attachment to their young, and great courage in defending them. Montbeillard says, that the parent birds will dart courageously at those who carry off their nestlings, and that the persevering mother has been known, when caged with her nest, to continue hatching in confinement, and to die while sitting on her eggs.

The epicures of the Greek isles consider the flesh of the oriole a great delicacy, and this is with other small birds often exposed there for sale.

CHAPTER II.

CHIFF-CHAFF—WILLOW WREN—HEDGE SPARROW—ALPINE ACCENTOR —DARTFORD WARBLER—GOLD-CREST—FIRE-CREST—COMMON WREN.

THERE is no season of the year which seems so full of life and beauty as the months of April and May. The lambs lie like patches of snow upon the meadow, now green with richest grass, and bright with its sprinkled daisies and buttercups. In the wood where the soft winds answer to the running brooks, the blue-bells are hanging, and the wind-flowers with their white and pink petals are all unharmed by the breeze. An odour of primroses and violets comes from the banks, and leaves quiver and dance in the sunshine, and cast a chequered shadow on the pathway. There is a loud concert of singing among the green boughs, and every day it becomes more varied. Not only are our resident birds in full song, but those visitants which wing their way across the ocean to

build their houses and rear their young in our woods, will all have reached us by the middle of May, and during that and the two following months all the minstrels of wood and glen, of mountain and river-side,—all may be heard and seen. It is the season of incubation, the period when the songs are sweetest; and when this is over many migratory birds will leave, and those which remain will be mostly silent, till the robin and wren begin their autumnal songs among the yellow leaves. It is not till late in May, that the soft and plaintive cooing of the turtle-dove announces its arrival, and when its silver wings flit along through the trees, we may hear, too, the note of the fly-catcher, which is one of our latest visitors. Long since, before the trees had put forth a spray of leaves to meet the chilling winds of March, and when the sloe had a white flower here and there upon its branches, and the willow-tree bore already its balls of gold, the chiff-chaff had come to join its notes with those of our thrush and blackbird, when a bright day invited them to song. Then the whinchat was soon heard as its abrupt notes issued from the furze-clad common. Early in April came the redstart, and then followed swal-

lows and martins, and we might say in the words of our earliest extant ballad—

> "Summer is come in,
> Loud sings the cuckoo."

There is life everywhere, and insects glitter in the sunbeam, and pursue their destined summer work:—

> "Bird, bee, and butterfly—the favourite three
> That meet us ever on our summer path!
> And what, with all her forms and hues divine,
> Would summer be without them? Though the skies
> Were blue, and blue the streams, and fresh the fields,
> And beautiful as now, the waving woods,
> And exquisite the flowers; and though the sun
> Beam'd from his cloudless throne from day to day,
> And with the breeze and shower, more loveliness
> Shed o'er this lovely world; yet all would want
> A charm, if those sweet denizens of earth
> And air, made not the great creation teem
> With beauty, grace, and motion! Who would bless
> The landscape, if upon his morning walk
> He greeted not the feathery nations, perch'd
> For love or song, amid the dancing leaves;
> Or wantoning in flight from bough to bough,
> From field to field? Ah! who would bless thee, June,
> If silent, songless, were the groves,—unheard
> The lark in heaven?"

And now the dwellers in the country can but remark how busy are the birds at nest building. Away they fly with the scrap of wool from the

sheepfold, or the feather from the farm-yard, or the moss from the bank, or the twig or lichen from the tree. In most cases, the labour of nest-building devolves on the female bird, and when her companion aids her, it is simply by carrying the moss, or wool, or grass, to the appointed spot, while many birds fail in even rendering this assistance. The hen bird collects her materials, and weaving a framework of dried stems and twigs, she by various movements of her body moulds the other substances to their destined form. There are birds which, like the cuckoo, make no nests, but leave to others the care of providing a dwelling for their little ones; but many nests are framed with exquisite skill, and so exactly fitted for the circumstances in which they are to be placed, that we may say with Hurdis, of one of them: It wins my admiration." Great indeed is the beauty of some of these structures, especially of those of the finches. That of the chaffinch or the goldfinch, of hemispherical shape, and formed of a compact framework, with its warm neat lining, is made with great skill and taste, and would lead one to infer that its builder had a love for the beautiful. The nest of the noisy

magpie suggests the idea that its owner had an eye to the dangers which awaited it, and so made a house adapted for defence from its enemies, and guarded so well with thorny branches, that one might as well attempt to seize a furze-bush hastily, as to grasp at it. The wren has the aperture of its nest at the side next to the light: and the blackbird building so early in spring, not only seeks the shelter of the evergreen boughs, but makes a firm wall to its nest, impervious to wind and rain. The swallow knows how to glue its cradle in the angle of the window or chimney, or beneath the eaves of the house; and constructs a solid dwelling of clay, thickened with straws and feathers, and well lined with a downy quilt. Many of the birds of other lands are even more ingenious architects than our native songsters. Thus the pretty Penduline Titmouse of the south and east of Europe, frames a nest of remarkable elegance, woven of down which it gathers from the catkin of the willow or poplar, or from the ball of the dandelion or the thistle tuft. Of these it manufactures a kind of felt or cloth, which it strengthens by the fibres of plants, while it lines its nest with a thick cushion of the down

in its natural state, making a ledge over the aperture of the nest, which it can close at will, and fastening the structure to a branch suspended over a running stream, so that the rats or snakes which frequent the waters, cannot reach it. There are birds of the East which build chambers in their nests, and others which ingeniously sew leaves together for a covering to their little homes; others are perfect basket-makers, and weave so well, that the birds have received the name of those artisans, whose fabrics their nests resemble.

The nests of our song-birds vary sometimes a little, in consequence of the situation or the materials which are to be found in the neighbourhood in which they are built; yet from one generation to another, they are framed with so much regularity that a practical ornithologist can tell at once, if he sees an empty nest, what species of bird was the architect. As James Montgomery has said:—

"The nightingale that dwelt in Adam's bower,
And pour'd his stream of music through his dreams;
The soaring lark, that led the eye of Eve
Into the clouds, her thoughts into the heaven
Of heavens, where lark nor eye can penetrate;
The dove that perch'd upon the tree of life,

And made her bed upon its thickest leaves:
All the wing'd habitants of Paradise,
Whose songs once mingled with the songs of angels,
Wove their first nests as curiously and well
As the wood minstrels in our evil day,
After the labours of six thousand years,
In which their ancestors have fail'd to add,
To alter, or diminish anything,
In that of which Love only knows the secret,
And teaches every mother for herself,
Without the power to impart it to her offspring."

That it is instinct, and not teaching which enables the bird to build its nest, we know from the fact that birds reared in cages where they have never seen the usual dwellings of their species, will, as far as materials and circumstances admit, form a nest like that of their kind. Some slight variations, according to necessity, may be seen; yet, as Mr. Knapp has observed, there is little deviation. "Birds," says this writer, "which build early in spring, seem to require warmth and shelter for their young. Thus the blackbird and thrush line their nests with a plaster of loam, perfectly excluding by these cottage-like walls, the keen icy gales of our opening years; yet if these are destroyed, they will build one in later summer, exactly like it, at a time when coolness would seem desirable."

It is truly wonderful and interesting to remark how the parental instinct works in the heart of the bird, altogether changing for a time its character and habits. Fitted for soaring, and restless and volatile beyond any other living creature, yet the hen bird will sit hour after hour, and day after day, upon her eggs, and in some cases her companion will share in this domestic duty; while at all times the mother-bird must depend on the care of her mate for her food. The constant labour of feeding the nestlings becomes a most arduous one, owing to the great quantity which young birds consume; and as it chiefly consists at that time of the soft bodies of insects, both birds must search actively and labour constantly to afford the supply. Colonel Montagu, who watched the manner in which a pair of Gold-crests fed their young, has recorded several interesting facts on this subject. He placed the nest, when the young were about six days old, in a basket in his study. The parent birds came to them; the male bird not having courage to enter into the room by the window, while the female braved all dangers, and at length would feed her young while this gentleman held the nest *in his* hand. The male

bird always accompanied his mate, while she flew backwards and forwards, but never ventured beyond the window frame, and after a time never brought food in his bill. "At first," says this writer, "there were ten young in the nest, but probably for want of the male's assistance in procuring food, two died. The visits of the female were generally repeated in the space of a minute and a half or two minutes, or upon an average thirty-six times in an hour, and this continued full sixteen hours in a day, and if equally divided between the eight young ones, each would receive seventy-two feeds in the day, the whole amounting to five hundred and seventy-six. From examination of the food, which by accident now and then dropped into the nest, I judged from those weighed, that each feed was a quarter of a grain, upon an average; so that each young one was supplied with eighteen grains' weight in a day, and as the young ones weighed about seventy-seven grains at the time they began to perch, they consumed nearly their weight of food in four days' time at that period. This extraordinary consumption seems absolutely requisite in animals of such rapid growth. The old birds of this species weigh from

eighty to ninety grains. I could always perceive by the animation of the young brood when the old one was coming, probably some low note indicated her approach, and in an instant every mouth was open to receive the insect morsel. But there appeared no regularity in the supply given by the parent bird: sometimes the same was fed two or three times successively, and I generally observed that the strongest got most, being able to reach farthest, the old one delivering it to the mouth nearest to her."

Not only is the patience of the mother-bird required during the time of sitting on the eggs, but when the nestlings are hatched they require the warmth of her sheltering wings, both by day and night, so that for several days after she is unable to quit them lest they should die of cold. And now, too, the timid bird becomes courageous, and will brave any danger to protect or feed the nestlings. Instances are recorded in which the lark, usually so easily frightened, has fluttered before the fowler to call his attention away from her younglings; and many birds, like the blue titmouse, will follow the person who seizes the young, and amid wild screams will rush at the

hand which bears away the nest. Whether or not the parent birds are able to give any instruction to their young, as to their mode of learning to fly, is doubted by some; but this is certain, that they watch over them, warn them of dangers, and never cease to aid and feed them, till their feathered wings enable them to provide for themselves.

But leaving birds in general, we must proceed to some of our slender-billed or soft-billed warblers. These are a very interesting family, from their sweetness of song. Most of them are migratory, though there are among them a few which remain with us all the winter.

Early in February, when as yet the trees are leafless, and the woods silent, save when the winds waken them into melody, that sweet little bird, the Hedge Warbler or Hedge Sparrow* (*Accentor modularis*) may be heard uttering its low song, which has a far less joyous sound than that of most birds, and is a perfect contrast to that of the lark, which

* The Hedge Sparrow is five inches and a half in length. The head and neck are dull grey, streaked with brown; the back and wings reddish brown, similarly streaked with darker; the tail dusky brown; the throat and breast greyish white; belly cream-white; the sides and flanks pale brown, streaked with darker: beak and feet brown.

is now sounding away over the green corn-field. One might fancy that our warbler was telling some tale of sorrow to the unpitying winds, or complaining like some poet to the boughs of the wood, or to the Dryads, with which his fancy peopled them. A peculiar shake of the wing is an accompaniment to the song, which, though little varied, is very sweet and gentle. The strain is usually short, and the bird sits perched upon the hawthorn or maple, which shadows the hedge-bank or skirts the wood, or sings it forth from some bough of the garden or orchard-tree. It is heard very early in the morning, and is better at that time, and at the close of eve, than in the middle of the day, though it may be heard at any hour, again and again, and is sung nearly throughout the year, save during the almost universal silence of autumn. It was probably of this bird that the poet wrote:—

"I thought the sparrow's note from heaven
Singing at dawn, from the alder bough;
I brought him home in his nest at even,—
He sings the song, but it pleases not now;
For I did not bring home the river and sky;
He sang to my ear—they sang to my eye."

But to return to our sober little bird, which, if

its song is sweet, is at least not remarkable for its beauty of colour, being clothed in a homely suit of reddish brown, streaked with a darker tint. It is known in many counties by the names of Hedge Chanter, and Dunnoch, and is also called Shufflewing, from its habit of shaking its wings perpetually. It is very active in all its movements, hopping quickly about our gardens; in spring and autumn, making its meal on the insects, worms, and slugs which it finds there, but never offending the gardener by robbing him of his fruit. But when the frosts and snows have killed the insects, and all the flower-seeds have been scattered by the wind, our little warbler comes to claim the kindness of man, and surely as well deserves a crumb from our table, as does the equally social and less timid robin. Then, too, the hedge sparrow, accompanied by its mate, finds its way into the rick-yard, and hovers about the lofts and granaries, where the corn is stored, and picks up the scattered grain, till warmer beams shall reawaken the insect world, and the little benumbed creatures which lie hidden under the green mosses shall again serve him for food more to his taste.

The hedge sparrow remains with us all the winter, and is common in all parts of England, building its nest as early as March. This is usually placed in some bush, which being yet bare, leaves it exposed to danger, so that the blue eggs which it contains are an easy prey to the young bird-nester, and are among the most numerous of these treasures which are threaded and hung up in cottages. The nest so easily found is often used by the cuckoo, as a home in which to place her egg, which being afterwards hatched by the fostering care of the unconscious warbler, it is commonly said that the hedge sparrow is the cuckoo's best friend.

An allied species to this, the Alpine Accentor,* (*Accentor alpinus*,) is too rarely seen in our island to deserve a lengthened notice. It is a common bird on the Swiss Alps, and often pleases the ear of the traveller who wanders over the mountains, and stops to share the hospitality of the monks of St. Bernard. Unlike its congener, the Hedge Accentor, it does not perch on trees or bushes, but

* The Alpine Accentor much resembles the Hedge Sparrow, but is rather larger, and may be readily distinguished by its white throat, studded with small black spots.

hops about the ground, or on rocks, seeming to love the companionship of man. One of these birds was killed in the garden of King's College, Cambridge, in November, 1822, and one in the following year in the garden of the Deanery, at Wells, in Somersetshire; and Mr. Yarrell has remarked that the resemblance of the steeple-crowned stone edifices of Cambridge, and of the Deanery, to the pointed and elevated rocks of their own peculiar haunts, may probably have been the attraction to the birds in both the localities referred to.

Flocks of little birds may be seen in March, which will, as spring advances, fill our now almost silent woodlands with melodies. Among the earliest of our spring arrivals is the Chiff-chaff,* or, as it is often called, Chip-chap (*Sylvia hippolais*). If its song is not remarkable for variety or richness, yet it is pleasing, because it reminds us that the singing birds which have sought in winter for a more congenial climate, are now coming back to their old haunts; and the notes which would

* The Chiff-chaff is four inches and three quarters in length. Whole upper parts ashy brown; lower parts dull brownish white, tinged with yellow; a pale streak over each eye; beak and feet dark brown.

hardly attract us amid the full chorus of song, are welcome now that song is scarce. This song is sometimes sung as early as the middle of March, and towards the end of that month is common. All the summer it is to be heard at intervals, and the hardy little bird lingers with us in some years till late in October, coming in company with the titmice and crested wren, to the gardens or fir plantations, and uttering its cheering notes often for many hours together, for some days previous to its departure. Sometimes this bird sings on the wing, as it darts across the garden path in search of insects, and at others it utters its strain from the high branches of the trees of those shady woods and thickets which it loves to haunt. Large gardens, too, furnish a favourite resort to the chiff-chaff, where it is most persevering in spring in clearing the aphides off the honeysuckles, rose-trees, and other bushes. And when in the latter part of March the golden balls of the willow-tree attract by their sweet perfume, an occasional butterfly, a wasp, a bee, or some other winged creature, then our elegant little bird may be seen, as Mr. Knapp has said, itself almost like a coloured catkin too, chasing the insects right merrily around the wil-

low, or other bough, or making its way to the orchard, not to eat the young buds, but to peck out the larvæ of the different species of *tortrix*, which lie enfolded in their green coils. The gardener may welcome the bird there all the summer through, for neither apple, nor cherry, nor plum will tempt it to plunder, while it will clear the trees of the insects, and feed unsparingly on the small caterpillars, and the downy moths, and the gnats and emmets, which may revel among the trees, or grass, or flowers.

The chiff-chaff is, with the exception of the wheat-ear, the earliest of the spring visitors; and it is the smallest of them all. Mr. Broderip mentions having received one in a cover, together with a written half sheet of paper, franked by the penny stamp. The little bird becomes very tame in captivity, and shows great affection to its owner. Mr. Sweet, in his "British Warblers," mentions one which would take a fly from his finger, and would settle upon the hand which held a spoon filled with milk, of which it was very fond, following the person who carried it round and round the room, sometimes darting to the ceiling and bringing thence a fly. By degrees it

became so familiar with its master, that it would sit and sleep on his knee as he sate by the fire; and would never attempt to fly out of the room, even when the windows were open. Mr. Sweet wished to ascertain if it was willing to quit him, and tried to get it into the garden, but though its favourite spoonful of milk was offered as a persuasive, it was difficult to induce the bird to leave the room, and twice it returned thither. The third flight that it attempted, was to a small tree, from which it again came to taste the milk; then it alighted on some chickweed; then bathed, and betook itself to a holly bush to dry its plumes. Here, however, the little bird was lost among the leaves. Its master's voice seemed unheard, and most probably the impulses of its migratory nature came powerfully upon it. Perchance some strange instinctive longing for a warmer land, with its fruits and flowers, and gauzy insects; some yearnings for companions, some restless desire for flight proved stronger than even its affection for its master, and away it went, to be seen no more, though all its species had long since departed, and were gone to see if November were less dreary in other lands than in ours.

The nest of the chiff-chaff is an oval structure, with a small aperture near the top. It is made of coarse dry grasses, externally coated with leaves, and lined with feathers. It is usually placed near the ground, in a low bush, or sometimes amid the thick grass on a bank; and it contains six white eggs, speckled with purplish red at the larger end. John Clare, who knew so well the different objects which are to be seen by those who dwell in the country, has well described this nest. He calls the bird the Petty-chap, and it is well known to naturalists by the name of Lesser Petty-chap:—

"Well! in my many walks I've rarely found
A place less likely for a bird to form
Its nest—close by the rut-gull'd wagon road,
And on the almost bare foot-trodden ground,
With scarce a clump of grass to keep it warm!
Where not a thistle spreads its spears abroad,
Or prickly bush, to shield it from harm's way;
And yet so snugly made, that none may spy
It out, save peradventure. You and I
Had surely pass'd it in our walk to-day,
Had chance not led us by it! Nay, e'en now,
Had not the old bird heard us trampling by,
And flutter'd out, we had not seen it lie
Brown as the road-way side. Small bits of hay
Pluck'd from the old propt haystack's bleachy brow,

And wither'd leaves, make up its outward wall,
Which from the gnarl'd oak-dotterel yearly fall,
And in the old hedge-bottom rot away.
Built like an oven,—through a little hole,
Scarcely admitting e'en two fingers in,
Hard to discern, the birds snug entrance win.
'Tis lined with feathers, warm as silken stole,
Softer than seats of down for painless ease,
And full of eggs, scarce bigger even than peas!
Here's one most delicate, with spots as small
As dust, and of a faint and pinky red.
Stop! here's the bird. That woodman at the gap
Frighten'd him from the hedge: 'tis olive green.
Well! I declare, it is the Petty-chap!
Not bigger than the wren, and seldom seen.
I've often found her nest in chance's way,
When I, in pathless woods did idly roam;
But never did I dream, until to-day,
A spot like this would be her chosen home."

The chiff-chaff is also called the Dark-legged Petty-chap, to distinguish it from the willow wren, which it much resembles, though smaller, being however at once distinguished from it by the dark brownish, almost black, colour of the legs and feet. Mr. Blyth remarks, that there is a peculiarity in its song not generally noticed: its common note, tick, tack, is known to us all; but this gentleman remarks, that after repeating this, seven or eight times in monotonous succession, it frequently alternates it with another sound, re-

sembling crah, crah, or cruh, reminding one of the harsh tones of the Reedlings.

The Scotch have an old proverb respecting small people,—"Little folks are soon angry, their heart's near to their mou'; " and it might be quoted in relation to this tiny bird, which is of a most quarrelsome disposition, even daring to attack birds much larger than itself. The writer just alluded to, remarks, "Last spring I was walking under some tall elms, from the top of which a chiff-chaff was, at intervals, repeating his double cry. A large common, overspread with furze, lay in one direction, while thousands of the song petty-chaps were warbling merrily. At length one of these settled on a bush close under the trees, and began to sing; whereupon down came the little chiff-chaff from above, and I witnessed a long-sustained battle between the two, both warbling their diverse notes in defiance, and by turns attacking and pursuing each other. Each indeed seemed to consider the other an antagonist of its own species, for it is seldom that different species quarrel, though a few will drive away all intruders from their abode." This writer adds that there are, however, several allied species,

which seem quite to regard each other as enemies, as the robin and red-tail, the whin and the stone-chats; and these will quarrel with each other, though amiable enough with birds less nearly allied; and on this principle the different kind of petty-chaps are very apt to fight in captivity.

Another early bird among our summer visitors is the Willow Wren* (*Sylvia trochilus*), called also Yellow Wren, Haybird, Garden Petty-chaps, Huck-muck, or Ground Wren,—the last name alluding, doubtless, to the place of its nest. The song of this bird may be heard in April, and is very loud and clear, making the woods to echo with the sound. A writer in the "Magazine of Natural History" remarks,—"Its song, if deserving of that name, has never been properly described in our works of natural history. It consists of whistling notes, which it runs through the gamut of B, thus comprising ten notes: the latter ones are very soft, and run into each other; and though it would thus appear anxious to be well grounded in the principles of music, by thoroughly and con-

* The Willow Wren is about five inches in length. Upper parts dull olive, more brown on the wings and tail; under parts whitish, tinged with yellow, except on the belly; a pale streak over each eye: legs and feet *pale brown.*

and I thought my little protégé safe from harm, when a flock of ducks that had strayed from the poultry-yard, with their usual curiosity, went straight to the nest, which was very conspicuous, as the grass had not grown high enough to conceal it, and with their bills spread it quite open, displaced the eggs, and made it a complete ruin. I now despaired; but immediately, on driving the authors of the mischief away, I tried to restore the nest to something like its proper form, and placed the eggs inside. That same day, I was astonished to find an addition of another egg, and in about a week, of four more. The bird sate, and ultimately brought out seven young ones; but I cannot help supposing it a singular instance of attachment and confidence, after being twice so rudely disturbed."

Birds in general show great attachment to their nests, and the notion that they will forsake them if the eggs are touched, seems quite incorrect. Mr. Sweet, who tried many experiments on this subject, was of opinion that they would not forsake the nest while laying, let the eggs be handled ever so much. He considers that it is the fright endured by the bird on being driven out,

which induces it to quit its little home, and return to it no more; and he remarks, that almost all birds will forsake the first nest in the season, if frightened out of it once or twice. The redbreast, the wren, blackbird, missel and song-thrushes, will all do this, and will commence building another home. But the bird seems to become bolder in this respect, as the season advances, and it has had more experience; for after building one or two nests, it will not be driven away, even if disturbed while sitting, but will return again and again. Some birds will even suffer themselves to be taken out with the hand, and put back again, and yet so cling to their homes, that even this terror will not scare them away.

The Wood Wren,* or Wood Warbler, or Green Wren (*Sylvia sylvicola*), is the Willie Muftis of the Scotch peasant. It is a larger bird than either the chiff-chaff, or the willow wren, but so similar, that until recently the three species have not been clearly distinguished from each other. Its

* The Wood Wren may be distinguished from the Willow Wren by having the upper parts of a brighter green, the eye-streak, the throat, breast, and flanks, clear yellow; and the belly pure white.

notes are not so sweet as those of the last-named bird, but are more like the chirpings of the merry grasshopper. First the strain commences with the sounds of "twee, twee, twee," oft repeated, and sounded very long; then follow the same sounds, uttered with great rapidity, and accompanied by a vibration of its wings. This song is usually sung from the summit of some old oak or beech, for it is in old woods, where the trees are thick and high, that this bird chiefly delights to dwell. It arrives in England at about the end of April, and leaves us in September; and it may be heard singing its shrill song almost all the summer, sometimes uttering it on the wing. Unlike most of our singing birds, it does not moult in autumn, but remains in its old plumage, and migrates without resigning its plumes.

This bird is very skilful in catching insects, either while on the wing, or when searching for them diligently in the crevices of the bark, or among the foliage of trees. It conceals its domed nest so cleverly, as that only an experienced bird-nester will find it out; but it may be distinguished from the very similar nests of the allied species, by the absence of feathers on the inside, it being

riably lined with fine grass and hair. Words-
:h's verses well describe it :—

> "So warm, so beautiful withal,
> In perfect fitness for its aim;
> That to the kind, by special grace,
> Their instinct surely came.
>
> "And when for their abodes they seek
> An opportune recess,
> The Hermit has no finer eye
> For shadowy quietness.
>
> "Oft in sequester'd lanes they build,
> Where, till the bird's return,
> Her eggs within the nest repose,
> Like relics in an urn."

ıe eggs of this bird are six in number, and
a white ground, which is, however, almost
:n by numerous spots and speckles of dark
lish red or ash colour.

ıe rare Dartford Warbler* (*Melizophilus Dart-
:nsis*), sings as early as the month of February,
for its sweet, though hurried song, deserves
ion among our singing birds. It is somewhat
, but very pleasing. This bird is often

ıe Dartford Warbler is about five inches in length. Upper
ge generally greyish black, approaching to brown on the
and tail; throat, breast, and sides chestnut, speckled with
on the chin; belly white; beak black, with pale edges;
le brown.

about the furze, lighting for a moment upon the very point of the sprigs, and instantly diving out of sight again, singing out their angry impatient ditty for ever the same. Perched on the outside of a good tall nag, and riding quietly along the outside, while the fox-hounds have been drawing the furze fields, I have seen the tops of the furze quite alive with these birds. They are, however, very hard to shoot; darting down directly they see the flash or hear the cap crack, I do not know which. I have seen excellent shots miss them, while rabbit-shooting with beagles. They prefer those places where the furze is very thick, high, and difficult to get in."

This bird has been found in Surrey, Devonshire, Cornwall, and Kent, and is believed to remain with us throughout the year. Its food consists of various insects.

Smaller than any other bird whose song gives music to our spring woods, is the delicate Gold Crest,* or Gold-crested Wren, or Marigold Finch,

* The Gold-crest is three inches and a half in length. Upper parts yellowish-olive; wing blackish, crossed by two narrow bands of white, and a broad interrupted one of black; crown-feathers bright yellow tipped with orange, the crown bordered with black; under parts yellowish-grey; beak black; feet brown.

GOLDEN-CRESTED WREN.

as it is sometimes termed (*Regulus auricapillus*). Its length is about three inches and a half, and its weight no more than seventy-five or eighty grains. It is called also kinglet; and, its Latin name *Regulus* signifying also a little king, was evidently bestowed in consequence of the soft silky feathers of its head, which are orange-coloured in the centre, shading off, on the sides, to a delicate yellow tint. A stripe of black runs along each side of the crest, and contrasts beautifully with the gayer hue. The beauty, both of colour and form, of this little bird is extreme, and its movements are most agile and graceful, no bird being more active than this. Now the gold-crests whisk through the dark branches of the fir-trees, like so many sylphs; now they hang hovering over a flower, singing all the while their melodious notes; and again they may e seen clinging, indifferently, in all positions to e boughs, sometimes with their feet upwards. eing so small as that a leaf may cover them, they e often hidden by the verdant screen of summer; ough when the wind is sighing through the bare nches of winter, they may be seen gathering in ll companies, looking diligently into the cre- s of the bark, or betaking themselves to the

greener fir-trees for a shelter, most closely inspecting every twig for the insects which swarm on the trunk and among the foliage of the dark yew-tree, or the towering pine. From their being so easily secreted among the leaves, some writers have thought the gold-crests less abundant in our island than they are now known to be. They appear to be very general in the northern parts of Britain, haunting especially the somewhat moist woods where the beech and fir overtop the growth of brambles and other underwood at their base, nothing seeming to delight them so well as the sombre foliage of the cedar, the yew and the pine.

It seems wonderful that so delicate a bird can brave the severity of our winters, and it can only be by means of its incessant activity that it can do so. The usual number of gold-crests is greatly increased in autumn by the arrival of others which come to pass the winter here, and it appears highly probable, that in some seasons, some of our gold-crests migrate into other lands. Though when in our woods they scarcely make a longer flight than from tree to tree, these little creatures can brave the winds of ocean, sometimes settling on the

tackle of the ships which are sailing across the waters, and being taken up in great exhaustion. Mr. Selby saw thousands of kinglets arrive on the sea-shore and sand-banks of Northumberland, after a very severe gale, in October 1822. The poor little birds were so fatigued, either by the length of their voyage, or by an unfavourable turn of the wind, that they were unable to rise from the ground, and large numbers were consequently taken and destroyed. In another case mentioned by the same ornithologist, in January 1823, a few days previous to a long-continued snow-storm in Scotland and the north of England, all the gold-crests, natives as well as strangers, had entirely disappeared from those districts, nor did any return, on the approach of spring, to the haunts which they were wont to enliven by their presence.

Though this bird is enabled, by means of perpetual exercise, to guard against the extreme cold, and though it finds a way to secrete itself in places where frost cannot reach it, yet it seems likely that many gold-crests perish in our most severe winters, notwithstanding their bustling activity and resources. The Hon. and Rev. W. Herbert

says, that in confinement the least cold proves fatal to them. This gentleman once took half a dozen of these golden wrens at the beginning of winter; they became exceedingly tame, and throve well upon eggs and meat. "At roosting time," he observes, "there was always a whimsical conflict among them for inside places, as being the warmest, which ended, of course, in the weakest going to the wall. The scene began with a low whistling call among them to roost, and the birds on the extreme right and left, flew on the backs of those in the centre, and squeezed themselves into the middle. A fresh couple from the flanks immediately renewed the attack upon the centre, and the conflict continued till the light began to fail them. A severe frost in February killed all but one of them in a night, though in a furnished drawing-room. The survivor was preserved in a little cage by burying it every night under the sofa cushions; but having been, one sharp morning, taken from under them before the room was sufficiently warmed by the fire, though perfectly well when removed, it was dead in ten minutes."

White has remarked that the golden-crested wren will stand unconcerned till you come within

three or four yards of it. Yet, though not of a mistrustful nature, the little bird is really very timid on the approach of actual danger. If the bough on which it is sitting is struck sharply with a stick, it immediately drops to the ground from terror, and is often taken up dead. Those who require it for a preserved specimen, find this a better mode of taking it than with the gun. In our country the bird is not an article of food, but, small as it is, it is eaten on some parts of the Continent, and Montbeillard tells us that the markets of Nuremberg abound with this little gold-crest, great numbers being taken in the environs of the city, by means of the bird-call. They become very tame in confinement, though their small size enables them sometimes to creep through the meshes of a net, and make their escape. Their notes are sweet and pleasing, though not strong. They have little variety, and the strain terminates abruptly. The beauty of these songsters has been well described by Gisborn, in his "Walks in a Forest."

"Aloft in mazy course the golden wren
Sports on the boughs: she, who, her slender form
Vaunting and radiant crest, half dares to vie

With those gay wanderers, whose effulgent wings
With insect hum still flutter o'er the pride
Of Indian gardens."

Nor is the nest of this little bird less remarkable for beauty than is the bird itself. This is very large in proportion to its architect, and has very thick walls, composed chiefly of green moss fashioned into a cup-like form, well interlaced with spiders' webs, and covered over at the top, save where one aperture admits the bird. The inside might rather be said to be filled, than lined with feathers, so plentifully does the bird place them for the warmth and comfort of her young; and the dwelling is swung, like a hammock, beneath the bough of the yew, or cedar, or larch-tree, or sometimes placed among the ivy. The gold crest would seem to love well the shadow of green boughs, for it often hangs the nest in such a manner as that a sweeping branch shall fall over it, screening it alike from the hot sun and the eye of the passer-by. The eggs are from seven to ten in number, and of a pale yellowish brown.

The gold-crest is very generally distributed over the southern counties of England, and is plentiful in Wales. It is also common in the

counties on the north of London. There is another British species, called the Fire-crested Regulus (*Regulus ignicapillus*), but it is a very rare bird here, though abundant in the forests of Germany. It much resembles our gold-crest, but has three dark lines on the side of the head, and is hence called by the French *triple bandeau.*

Who that notices birds has not a kindly thought for that sweet songster of the winter day, that familiar little bird, the common Wren, or Kitty Wren, or Jenny Wren* as it is often called? the *Troglodytes Europæus* of the ornithologist. Every country child gives it a welcome, as it hops about the garden or beside the arbour, glad enough, when snows and frosts are come, to share the meal of the robin. Like the redbreast it is a privileged bird, and the legends are of great antiquity which describe it as peculiarly protected by the care of Him who made it. Grose remarks that it is held extremely unlucky to kill a cricket, a lady-bug, a swallow, martin, robin redbreast, or wren. It is supposed, he says, that any one

* The Wren is nearly four inches in length. Plumage reddish-brown, crossed by narrow bars of blackish; the ground-colour is paler on the under parts, fading to light buff on the breast and throat; beak brown; feet pale brown.

killing them would infallibly break a bone, or meet with some misfortune during the year; but the old legend no longer prevails with respect to the insect favourites, with the exception of the cricket; and the redbreast and wren seem the only privileged birds of modern times.

It is remarkable that a bird thus shielded by tradition in one country, should be the object of cruel treatment in another, on the ground of ancient legend. In Ireland, however, a barbarous custom, of great antiquity, prevails in modern days, of hunting the wren on Christmas-day, though happily the usage is becoming less frequent than formerly. The peasants are accustomed at this season, just when the poor bird needs most the kindness of man, to chase it through the hedges, and to beat it to death with sticks. This they accomplish by means of two sticks, with one of which they strike the bushes, while the other is thrown at the wren. Mr. Thompson, in treating of the birds of Ireland, remarks that it was the boast of an old man, who died at Kerry, at the age of a hundred years, that he had hunted the wren for the last eighty years on a Christmas-day. On St. Stephen's-day the village children carry about

an ivy-bush, decked with variously coloured ribbons, among which the slaughtered birds are exhibited. They go from house to house, collecting money, and singing the well-known and foolish song commencing thus,—

> "The wran, the wran, the king of all birds,
> St. Stephen's-day was cot in the furze,
> Although he is little, his family's grate,
> Put your hand in your pocket, and give us a thrate,
> Sing holly, sing ivy, sing ivy, sing holly," &c. &c.

A little inoffensive bird like the wren seems ill to merit this traditionary hatred, but Aubrey, in his Miscellanies, relates the tale which is its supposed origin. After having mentioned the last battle in the North of Ireland, between the Protestants and Roman Catholics, in Glinsuly, in the county of Donegal, he says, "Near the same place a party of the Protestants had been surprised sleeping, by the popish Irish, were it not for several wrens, that just wakened them, by dancing and pecking on the drums, as the enemy was approaching. For this reason the wild Irish mortally hate them to this day, and killing them whenever they can catch them, they teach their children to thrust them full of thorns; you'll see sometimes on holi-

days a whole parish running like madmen from hedge to hedge, a wren-hunting."

Sonnini records a cruel hunting of the wren common in some parts of France, at the latter end of December, but in that country a different tradition accounts for it.

But leaving superstitious practices, which are too often mingled up with the elements of cruelty, we must return to our bird, the smallest of all our singers save the gold-crest. Its song, short, sweet and lively as it is, loses nothing from the fact of being heard when none else save that of the robin is likely to arrest our step, as we hasten over the frosty ground. One could hardly believe that so loud a song issued from so small a throat; but the bird gives us full means of ascertaining that it does so, for it sits perched on the top of the farm-yard stack, or on the bough of the hedge-row, or on the gooseberry bush, singing as merrily as if it were summer, and apparently well pleased to have a listener, as if it scarcely expected that we should come abroad in January to hear it. Nor can we mistake the wren for another bird, for its very smallness serves to identify it, and no sooner has it uttered one short stave, than it is away to another

spot, making short, weak flights, or hopping about with drooping wings and raised tail, making a low chirring sound. If alarmed by our near or sudden approach, it winds its way most ingeniously through the hedges or bushes, and again we see it at a short distance a minute afterwards, flying off a little farther, and creeping away from us as a mouse might do. Though it does not come with the robin to peck its meal from the window-sill, or around the breakfast table, it ventures into the farm-yards and gardens for what it may chance to find, though doubtless in severe seasons many wrens die of hunger. Treat our little jenny-wren but gently, however, and do not alarm it by a rash footstep, and it will love your company, and flutter for some paces before you, as if it intended to show you the way, seeming all the time to mark you with a most inquisitive look, as apparently not only observing your actions, but even canning your physiognomy.

The wren builds early in spring, generally about larch, placing its nest against the side of a tree, hay-rick, the wall of a house, or some other eltered spot; and it often shows much sagacity making it to correspond in colour with the object.

near it; thus, when affixing it to a mossy-covered trunk, green is the predominant hue; while, when near the hay-rick, a large amount of dried grasses renders the nest of similar colour; and again, when sheltered by the ivy, the moss prevails. This ingenuity is not, however, universally practised by the wren, and, as Mr. Jennings has observed, something must depend on the ease or difficulty with which the materials can be procured. This writer remarks, that when the nest is made wholly of green moss, and he has seen many so made, it is much more neatly and exactly defined than when composed of any other material. Grey lichens and grasses are used in some cases by the wren, and the interior is lined either with hair or feathers, and contains about eight or ten eggs, though sometimes there are as many as eighteen. They are of a yellowish white, speckled with brown.

Many little acts of ingenuity in rendering the nest less obvious to the passer-by, have been recorded by those who have noticed birds. Mr. Jesse tells us of one that he had in his possession, which, being built among some litter, thrown into the yard, so nearly resembled the surrounding objects,

that it was only discovered by means of the bird flying out of it. He adds, some of the straws were so thick, that one wonders how so small a bird could have used them. Mr. Yarrell observes of this, that in such cases the wren was, in some measure, influenced by the proximity of materials; but several instances are recorded by naturalists, in which design is so marked, that we hardly know whether to call it instinct or reason.

"I was much pleased this day, June 14th," says Mr. Knapp, "by detecting the stratagems of a common wren to conceal its nest from observation. It had formed a hollow space in the thatch, on the inside of my cow-shed, in which it had placed its nest by the side of a rafter, and finished it with its usual neatness; but lest the orifice of its cell should engage attention, it had negligently hung a ragged piece of moss on the straw-work, concealing the entrance, and apparently proceeding from the rafter; and so perfect was the deception, that I should not have noticed it, though tolerably observant of such things, had not the bird betrayed her secret, and darted out. Now from what operative cause did this stratagem proceed? Habit it was not; it seemed like an after-thought; danger was per-

ceived, and the contrivance which a contemplative being would have provided, was resorted to."

Nor should we here forget the poet's testimony to a little contrivance of this sort, narrated by Wordsworth, in his poem called the Wren's Nest. A pair of these birds had placed their cozy dwelling in a green covert, made by the branches of a pollard oak.

"But she who plann'd this mossy lodge,
Mistrusting her evasive skill,
Had to a primrose look'd for aid,
Her wishes to fulfil.

"High on the trunk's projecting bough,
And fix'd, an infant's span, above
The budding flowers, peep'd forth the nest,
The prettiest of the grove."

In later days, the poet wandered to the oak to show to some friends the nest placed so prettily there, when he could see it no longer, and believed that some rude hand had carried it away.

"Just three days after, passing by
In clearer light, the moss-built cell
I saw, espied its shaded mouth,
And felt that all was well.

"The primrose for a veil had spread
The largest of her upright leaves;
And thus for purposes benign
A simple flower deceives."

A very singular circumstance occurs respecting wrens' nests. Many are found in an incomplete state, and it would seem that, after having been begun, they were abandoned by the bird, which, on second thought, deemed that the site had been, in some way or other, ill-chosen. These half-finished empty nests are often found in very conspicuous places, instead of being well planned for concealment.

As the old Irish song says of the wren, "Her family is grate." She has two broods in a season, and as many as sixteen young birds have been sometimes found in one nest. There must be much to do in feeding a family like this, for in common with all other nestlings, they are very voracious, and the wrens are not far fliers, and must therefore seek their food very near their home. The nest is large and deep, and some of the young brood must be placed at so great a distance from the aperture, that one would fancy they must be sorely inconvenienced for want of light and air. There, however, they thrive, and, as Graham says, are

"Fed in the dark, not one forgot."

It was doubtless because of this dome-like and

gloomy dwelling, that the ancients termed the wren *Troglodytes*, or dweller in caves.

The wren is a most valuable little bird in ridding plants of the numerous insects which infest them, and it may often be seen, with its tail raised, hunting every bud and leaf, and peering with its bright eyes into every crevice of the bough, chirring, and evidently enjoying its occupation. Cabbages, peas, beans, lettuces, flower-stems, are all searched and cleared; and when these resources fail, and the cold drives the wren nearer to the homes of man, it hops about the thatch of the barn or cottage, or by the side of the drains, or among the straw of the farm-yard, hunting up any dormant insects which lie hidden, to open to their summer life when sunshine is come.

A gentleman who watched a pair of wrens with a brood of little ones, found that they went from the nest, and returned with insects in their mouths, from forty to sixty times in an hour; and in one particular hour, the birds carried food to their young seventy-one times. He considers that they worked thus twelve times a-day, and that, taking the medium of fifty times in an hour, they thus

cleared from the plants at least six hundred insects in the course of the day. This calculation is made on the supposition that the two birds took only a single insect each time. But it is highly probable that they carried off more than one at every flight.

Notwithstanding that the wren is hardy, and seems to enjoy the clear bright days of winter, yet probably in extremely severe seasons many of the species die of cold and want. During this period, they seek shelter in holes of walls, and under the eaves of corn and hay-stacks. Mr. Selby found the dead bodies of several wrens in an old deserted nest, where they had probably assembled to crowd closely together, for the sake of warmth and shelter from the storm; and a number of wrens rolled together, as in a ball, have been found in a hole of a wall, to which they had apparently come for the night. It is probable that many of our little birds may thus, during winter, keep close together, and so preserve the heat of themselves and each other. When kept in cages, wrens are generally supplied with a well-covered and lined box in which they may pass the night.

It is difficult to conjecture why the wren should,

from earliest ages, have been called the king of the birds, and this not merely by ancient writers, but by the peasantry of almost every land. Our little gold-crest seems fitted by his beautiful coronal to bear the name of Kinglet, the synonyme of which is so general; but the wren is small and feeble, and has withal no robe of royalty, nor the crown of gold. The old writers tell that the eagle fought with the wren, as with a rival king; and Colonel Vallancy, in his learned work on the Irish, terms the wren, the augur's favourite, and remarks that the Druids represented it as the king of birds. He adds, that the superstitious reverence formerly shown to this little creature, offended the early Christian missionaries, and that their displeasure on account of it originated the cruel practice before alluded to, of hunting and killing the bird on Christmas-day. Of old times, it was also called

> "The little wrenne,
> Our Lady's henne;"

so that, somehow or other, the bird has, from remotest periods, been an object of superstition. Even to the present day, the Italians call it the Little king (*Reattino*), the King of the hedge (*Re di*

siepe), or the King of the birds (*Re degli uccelli*). The Spaniards, too, term it the Kinglet; and the Portuguese, the Bird-king. So also the French give it the name of *Roitelet*, or Little king, or of King-berry (*Roi-berry*), or of King of the cold (*Roi de froidure*). The Germans call it by the poetic names of Snow-king (*Schnee-König*), and Thorn-king (*Dorn-König*). The Dutch preserve still their old name of the wren (*Konije*, Little king), and the Welsh simply term it *Bren*, King. In some French provinces, the peasants call the wren by the no less unaccountable name of *Bœuf de Dieu*.

The wren is a bird of solitary and retiring habits, and is very generally diffused throughout the British isles, and, indeed, through Europe, singing its humble song the winter through, in cold and cheerless scenes, amid the icicles on the trees, and even when the flakes of snow come slowly down like plumes, with which to invest the streams and woods and fields.

CHAPTER III.

SEDGE WARBLER—REED WARBLER—GRASSHOPPER WARBLER—WAGTAILS.

If there is any spot in our country which, by the richness of its vegetation, might remind us of the scenery of the tropics, it is the border of our stream or river. The water-side has often an aspect of peculiar beauty and fertility, for most aquatic plants produce a great number of seeds, and moisture is every way favourable to vegetable development. Around and in the still river, thousands of flowers are crowding, and the tall brown feathery plume of the reed nods beside the brown bulrush, and is shaken by every wind which brings a ripple on the surface. Rich purple willow herbs cluster there, and the tall iris, with its petals of gold, rises above the white and yellow water lilies, whose large leaves cover the surface. Bright green sprays of the duck-weeds and pondweeds are spread out on the water,

and floating masses of confervæ grow so fast, that if the pond be cleared in one day of them all, the morrow's sun shall again smile on a surface verdant as ever with a new growth. And there, casting the shadow of their slender boughs on the stream, the silvery willows wave gently to and fro, opening their catkins in the early spring to nourish the insect tribes, when, as yet, scarcely another flower offers them food. Beautiful they are in spring, and more beautiful still when in later months those catkins have ripened, and the soft silk of their downy clusters is floating far and wide on the air, or settling on every flower and blade of grass around the stream.

It is sweet to wander thither at early morning, listening to the music of the water which slowly winds among the grass and sedges, and seems as an accompaniment to the voice of the bird, that is singing its song from some tall reed. The sunshine glitters on the stream, and the dew on the grass receives all the bright hues of nature. There is a sabbath silence on the hills, interrupted only by the strain of the birds. No sound of alarm is there, or that song would not be so joyous, and its sweet echo gives assurance that we

may wander fearlessly over those green meadows. War has not come hither to scare the birds, as it came once on the plains of Waterloo, scaring them so effectually, that for long years after, their music resounded no more from the neighbouring forest. But he who will rise up at the voice of the bird now, and come to their quiet retreats by the still rivers, shall hear the tune of the untiring songsters, some of whom have not been silent even during the night, but have sung their gladness to the moon and stars.

Such a bird is the Sedge Warbler* (*Salicaria phragmitis*), whose song may be heard by day or night in such a scene as we have described. This is a decidedly aquatic species, and is very abundant on the sides of rivers, or on marshy or boggy land, in every part of our island. There it hides under the covert of the reeds, or among the sharp sword-like leaves of the flowering rush; or it settles on the willow bough or on the

* The Sedge Warbler is four inches and three-quarters in length. Upper parts reddish-brown, clouded and streaked with darker; wing quills and tail dark brown; head streaked with blackish, and marked over each eye with a cream-coloured band; throat white, becoming buff on the breast and belly; beak and feet pale brown.

hawthorn, which, at a short distance, is covered with its pearly clusters of blossoms. It is fond, however, of burying itself among the rushes, and is thus oftener heard than seen. One can hardly praise the song as a very sweet one. It is a shrill rapid succession of notes, and is seldom heard from one bird only, for these social creatures are wont to sing in chorus: yet it is a strange wild strain, and in these quiet places has a charm, arising rather from its singularity and pleasant associations, than from its melody. The sedge-bird is considered a sort of mocking bird, as it seems sometimes, though in a rapid and confused manner, to be occupied in imitating the song of the skylark, the chirp of the sparrow or the goldfinch, and the twitter of the swallow; sometimes introducing, in the midst of these apparent imitations, a deep harsh note, which though faintly resembling the chirr of the whitethroat, yet truly belongs to no bird save our sedge warbler.

Professor Rennie, though acknowledging some similarity in the notes of this bird's song to those which are supposed to be imitated, considers that they are, notwithstanding, the natural tones of the singer. He remarks: "From the sedge bird

coarse bents, thickly lined with hair, and the eggs are of a pale yellowish-brown colour, with darker streaks of the same hue. Early in May, great numbers of these nests lie concealed among the sedges which grow around the borders of the Thames.

This bird is but a summer visitor to our land, coming hither in April, and staying till October; and its companion among the sedges, the Reed Warbler,* or Reed Wren (*Salicaria arundinacea*), arrives at about the same season, though it usually departs earlier in the year. Though it wears a sober suit, this bird, too, is a gladsome creature, and, like its congener, lives on the food to be found in and near the waters, feasting on the little worms and slugs which lie among the leaves, or seizing the fresh-water shell-fish when it comes to breathe the air of the surface, easily disposing of the shelly house, by breaking the fragile tenement with its beak. Nor do our birds hesitate to arrest the brilliant dragon-fly which soars around the stream, or to stop suddenly the singing of the gnat, which

* The Reed Warbler is five inches and a half in length. Upper parts pale reddish-brown without spots; chin and throat white; breast and belly pale buff; beak and feet pale brown.

is dancing there in intricate mazes. The reedlings seem to live in perfect harmony with the sedge birds, and sing and build among the rushes with them. The reed warbler, however, differs from them in this, that it never flits away to a neighbouring bough to sing, but confines itself closely to the reedy shore. The song is more sweet and varied than that of the sedge warbler, and though hurried, and sometimes apparently imitative of other birds, yet it is not intermingled with many harsh notes. It may be heard chiefly at morning or evening twilight. At times it resembles the words "tran, tran, tran," repeated a dozen or fifteen times in succession. And it is so loud that it may be heard far away from the stream side.

The nest of the reed warbler is very beautiful. It is a long, deep structure, and is hung upon the reeds, or rather intermixed among them; three reeds serving as poles for its support. It is formed of branches of reeds and long grass wound round and round, and mingled with a good quantity of wool. The depth of the nest affords security both to the eggs and nestlings, so that though the wind may shake the reeds ever so much, they are not

thrown out, nor does the mother bird seem alarmed when some sweeping gust rushes among them, and bows both her home and herself nearly to the surface of the water. She knows that the long strips of grass which bind the nest to the reed stalk are fixed securely, and that that beautiful plume-like reed will bend and rise again unbroken by the wind. On some rare occasions indeed, when long-continued rains have swollen the stream beyond its usual boundaries, the nest will be submerged, but it is generally placed with so prudential a skill, as that many, like the peasants of Lorraine, judge of the height to which the water will arrive, by the elevation of the nests of the reedlings. The mother-bird is not easily alarmed, and Colonel Montagu saw a reed warbler retaining her seat on the nest, when every gust bent it almost to the surface of the stream. Both this bird and the sedge warbler are very common in Holland, where the sedgy dikes afford them a good retreat. In our country the latter species is more numerous than the former.

The eggs of the reedling wren are greenish-white, spotted with olive and brown. Happily the bird is not relished as food, neither will it bear

confinement, so that it is permitted to sing its song in the wild and pleasant scenes of nature.

The Grasshopper Warbler,* or Grasshopper Lark (*Salicaria locustella*), is not, like our sedge-birds, an aquatic species, but, haunting the brambles and underwood of low damp situations, it is sometimes found not far from their abodes, though by no means confined to moist lands. This species is also called Cricket-bird, Brakehopper, Grasshopper, Chirper, and also Rattlesnake bird. All these names refer to the peculiar sounds of its notes, which resemble sometimes the cry of the mole-cricket, and at others the rattle of the formidable reptile of hotter regions; though, as Mr. Blyth has remarked, it is difficult to imagine how the latter should be sufficiently well known in England to give rise to a provincial name. One would think from the variety of its country appellations, that this was a familiar and frequent bird; yet it is not so, for it is not only very local in its haunts, but so shy in its habits that it is

* The Grasshopper Warbler is five inches and a half in length. Upper parts greenish-brown, clouded (except on the tail) with blackish spots; under parts pale brown, spotted on the breast with darker brown. The tips of the tail-feathers are pointed.

rarely seen. It secretes itself in hedge bottoms, winding its way among the interlacing stems of the brambles, or the thick tufts of the furze branches of the common; creeping for several yards in succession, more like a mouse than a bird, so that one can rarely get a sight of the little creature, whose sharp shrill notes are, however, echoed far and wide. When Mr. Selby wished to obtain specimens, he was obliged to watch for a considerable time before he could get a sufficient view of a bird to enable him to fire at it. If approached unawares, it runs along over the ground, perking up its tail in the most curious manner.

Many, however, who have never seen the grasshopper warbler, have heard its remarkable note, particularly about sunset, and even in the night. It is a long, repeated, shrill, hissing cry, repeated without intermission, for some minutes together. The bird is most inaptly termed a warbler, for it certainly never warbles at all; but the peculiarity of its singing is, that it possesses a kind of ventriloquising faculty, so that its voice scarcely ever seems to proceed from the true direction. It can, at will, send forth its tones to the distance of two or three yards, so that by merely turning round

its head, the sound often appears to be shifted to double that distance. Mr. Blyth remarks, "The same effect is produced also by the common meadow-crake, and in precisely the same manner, by a mere turn of the head. When this curious cricket-bird first arrives, it sedulously hides itself," he adds, "in the very densest furze or bramble coverts, rarely emitting its strange sibilous rattle, which hardly ever seems to proceed from the true spot."

The male birds, as with some other migratory species, arrive first, and as soon as they have fixed their abode, and their companions begin to follow, the ventriloquising note ceases, lest it should serve only to mislead; and at this time the male bird sits on the topmost twig of the bushes, and rattles so loudly as to be heard at a great distance. "They are at this period so bold, as that if even shot at and missed, they fly only two or three yards, and then recommence immediately as if nothing had happened." This accurate observer remarks, that for two successive years he had heard the trill on the 10th of April for the first time in the season.

The grasshopper bird is thus noticed by White,

of Selborne:—"Nothing can be more amusing than the whisper of this little bird, which seems to be close by, though at a hundred yards' distance, and when close at your ear is scarcely any louder than when a great way off. Had I not been a little acquainted with insects, and known that the grasshopper kind is not yet hatched, I should have hardly believed but that it had been a locusta whispering in the bushes. The country people laugh when you tell them it is the note of a bird."

The greenish and brownish shades of the plumage are well adapted to the bird's desire of concealment. It builds its nest in the very thickest and most secluded spot of the underwood, making it very compact and substantial, and taking for its materials the dried grass stems and the green moss. The eggs are very pretty, being of a pinkish grey, speckled with a deeper tint.

Our bird comes to us from the warmer regions of the South in April, and quits us in September. It seems to be more general in the counties around London than in any other part of Britain.

Those who are used to ramble among the lands made green and luxuriant by the silver streams which meander among them, must have remarked

those merry graceful birds, the Wagtails. Now we see them peering down among the leaves of the water-flowers, or wading into the stream itself, and seizing the slugs and shell-fish which lie hidden there, or the beautiful winged creatures resting for a moment upon them; or devouring the larvæ of some, which if left untouched, would soon be rising on wings of azure and gold. These birds are most delicately formed, with slender bodies and equally slender feet, their small heads terminated by exquisitely moulded bills, and their long well-balanced tails moving up and down perpetually. The merry wagtails, or dishwashers, as country people call them, may be easily distinguished from any other birds, for none of our wood or stream-side minstrels at all resemble them in form, or in the black and white plumage which is so conspicuous even at a distance in the commoner species.

The Pied Wagtail* (*Motacilla Yarrellii*), might, for some of its habits, be almost classed with the

* The Pied Wagtail is seven inches and a half in length. The ground colour is black; but the forehead, the sides of the head and of the neck, the edges of the wing-coverts, and of the tertials, the outer tail-feathers, and the belly, are white. These are the hues of spring; but in winter the back becomes grey, and the chin and throat are white; the beak and feet are black.

waders, for it will remain in the shallow water for ten minutes at a time, walking along in pursuit of spiders and other insects. Sometimes it may be seen thus employed at the edge of the rivulet, or running along over the lawn of the garden, or on the meadow land; or making a short and sudden flight, with its tail outspread like a broad oar, and sailing about in the air with most graceful evolutions. It is no wonder that the birds have the popular name of wagtail, for this tail of theirs seems in incessant motion, vibrating not only in its flat and oar-like state during flight, but also quivering perpetually when raised in a perpendicular direction, as the lively creature runs along the ground. The French call these birds *les lavandières*, for they are often the constant companions of the washerwomen, who in France assemble by the sides of rivers to perform their occupations, and whose operation of beating the linen the wagtails seem to imitate by the movements of their tails. The birds seem, indeed, at all times perfect types of symmetry and glee, running with delight into the water, waging perpetual war with the insect race, and, during the period when their young demand food, requiring no small number to provide

for their eager voracity. Nor do the parent birds themselves find a few sufficient for their supply, for they devour them with insatiable earnestness; and as they jerk about in the air after the gnats, or run pecking over the ground, their lively shrill notes of "guit, guit, guit, guit," have a sound which accords well with their active motions.

The pied wagtail seems fond of the companionship of man, often keeping near the labourer in the fields, and seeming far less fearful of him than of the bird of prey. It will run by the cattle, and look well into the broad furrows which the passing ploughshare leaves in the field, making successive leaps as it follows this; rising in the air considerably at the beginning of each effort, and sinking again at the close; swallowing a number of insects, which the ploughman turns up in his course, taking them more frequently from the ground than during flight. Mr. Yarrell quotes a letter from Mr. Rayner, in which the writer remarks, that in the summer and autumn of 1837, he had several wagtails of the pied and yellow species in his aviary, which were all very expert in catching and feeding on the minnows which were in a fountain in the centre. They hovered

over the water, and seized the minnow with great dexterity as it approached the surface. He adds, that he was also much surprised at the wariness and cunning of some blackbirds and thrushes, which watched the wagtails during this process, and no sooner saw them take the prey, than they wickedly seized and secured it for their own dinners.

The pied wagtail appears to be a permanent resident in the southern parts of England, but is migratory in the northern counties, and in Scotland, leaving at the approach of winter, and returning about February or March. In autumn some of the pasture-lands, which are watered by streams, are rendered quite lively by the graceful and incessant motions of small flocks of these birds, which congregate there previously to taking their departure. As evening comes on, they retire into the bushes or copsewood near, making an incessant clamour, till darkness has overtaken all nature. As they wing their way onwards, with their jerking flight, made at no great height in the air, their noisy clamour would suggest the idea that the whole party was engaged in quarrelling with each other, no two holding the same opinions.

The pied wagtail was, until recently, believed to be the same as the continental species, and both kinds were included by ornithologists under the name of *Motacilla alba*. Mr. Gould ascertained that they were quite distinct from each other, and that our English wagtail is much more robust than the white or pied wagtail of France, and of Europe generally. During winter, the colours of the two species are so similar as to account for their having so long been thought one; and their manners and habits are exactly alike. In summer, however, the pied wagtail of England has the whole of the head, back, and chest of a full deep jet black; while in the continental kind, at this period, the throat and head alone are of this colour, and the rest of the upper surface is of a light ash grey. This writer considers, that the Motacilla alba, though so common in the neighbourhood of Calais, has not yet been discovered on the opposite shores of Kent; he therefore named our English bird after the excellent naturalist, Mr. Yarrell. There are some good observers of birds, however, who think that the continental species is occasionally seen in our island.

The pied wagtail has, besides its call-note, a

sweet and varied song, though not a loud one. In autumn it is like a low sweet murmur. "Encore," says the old French naturalist Belon, "ils savent rossignoller du gosier mélodieusement, chose qu'on peut souvent fois ouïr sur le commencement de l'hiver." It builds its nest generally somewhere near the stream, sometimes placing it in holes, or on a bank near to the edge of the water; but more frequently among piles of wood, or in heaps of stones, or perhaps in some old pollard willow which grows near the river, and whose ancient trunk remains when the greener boughs have long since disappeared. This wagtail is not a neat builder, and its dwelling is constructed somewhat carelessly, of small roots, and moss, and fibres of grasses mixed with wool, and lined with hair. The eggs are five in number, of a greyish-white colour speckled with brown. There are usually two broods in the year, and the parent birds are most courageous in the defence of their young, flying round and round the person who takes the nest, as if determined not to forsake it, and all the time uttering a wild scream of agony. Few birds either are more careful in keeping the nest clean, and removing from it continually anything which

might render it unfit for the delicate little nestlings whose home it is.

The wagtail will not long endure captivity, but its song, though sweet in a wild state, offers little temptation to the bird trainer. In Egypt the flesh of these birds is eaten, and they are dried in the sand for this purpose.

That intrusive bird, the cuckoo, seems greatly to prefer the wagtail's nest to that of any other, when she intends finding a place for her eggs. The cuckoo has been often observed narrowly watching a pair of wagtails, during the process of nest-building, and indeed the busy birds can rarely escape the prying eyes of the less industrious one. Mr. Hoy, of Stoke Nayland, remarks: "On one occasion I had observed a cuckoo, during several days, anxiously watching a pair of wagtails building. I saw the cuckoo fly from the nest, two or three times before it was half completed; and at last, the labour of the wagtails not going on, I imagine, so rapidly as might be wished, the cuckoo deposited its egg before the lining of the nest was finished. The egg, contrary to my expectation, was not thrown out, and on the following day the wagtail commenced laying, and, as usual,

the intruder was hatched at the same time as the rest, and soon had the whole nest to itself."

On another occasion, a cuckoo was observed to deposit its egg in the nest of the pied wagtail. In process of time, the young foundling was seen at the top of the thatch of the building where the nest was, and where its foster-parents carefully fed it. The swallows, however, are not so forbearing with intruders, but seemed in this case highly indignant, and determined to frighten the innocent cause of their displeasure. They came down upon it, swooping to and fro in their anger, but the little cuckoo made neither defence nor appeal, but simply threw back its head, and opened its mouth, though, as he who observed it adds, "whether in fear, or to intimidate them, I cannot say."

The Grey Wagtail* (*Motacilla boarula*), is even a more elegant and graceful bird than the pied

* The Grey Wagtail is seven inches and three quarters in length. Upper parts slate-grey; wing and tail feathers black with yellowish edges; the outmost feathers of the tail almost wholly white; chin and throat black, descending in a point on the breast; a streak above each eye, and one on the side of the neck pale buff; whole under parts and the upper tail-coverts brilliant yellow. In winter the black disappears from the chin and throat, which with the breast and belly become yellowish-white; the beak and feet are dusky brown.

GREY WAGTAIL.

species. Like that, however, it loves the streamsides, though it seems to prefer hilly districts to plains. It seeks its food on the borders of the brooks and rivers, and comes, too, to the stagnant ditch where the constant decomposition of vegetable substances engenders a great profusion of insects. Its song is very superior to that of the pied wagtail; while its shrill call-note often attracts the attention of those who would not else observe it. This consists of the words "chiz, chiz, chizzel, chizzet," so that, as an accurate observer has said, it seems very fond of the letter z. The same writer, in a contribution to the Magazine of Natural History, remarks: "I have been amused with a singular habit which I have noticed in several individuals of the grey wagtails. They were fond of looking at their own images in the windows, and attacking them, uttering their peculiar cry, pecking and fluttering against the glass, as earnestly as if the object they saw had been a real rival, instead of an imaginary one; or perhaps they were only admiring themselves, and testifying their satisfaction in this way. It is remarkable, that two of these instances were in the autumn, when the same motives for either love

or animosity which would be likely to actuate them in the spring, would no longer exist. The first of these instances occurred when I was a boy, and was repeated daily, and almost hourly, both against the windows of my father's house, and those of that of our neighbour; who being rather superstitious, was alarmed about it, and came to consult my mother on the subject. She said there was a bird, which her brother had told her was a barley bird, which was continually flying against the windows; and as birds were not in the habit of doing so at any other time, she thought some serious calamity was portended by it. My mother comforted her as well as she could; and I undertook to rid her of the annoyance. By setting a horse-hair noose on one of the window ledges, which it was in the habit of frequenting, I soon caught it; and by plucking out the under-tail coverts, which I wanted to dress yellow duns with, I effectually cured it of the propensity."

This bird, is, during the summer, very generally diffused throughout Europe. In Scotland and the northern counties of England it is a regular summer visitor, coming to us in April, and quitting at about the end of September. It is described

YELLOW WAGTAIL

by Selby, however, as having been seen in the south of England in the winter only during its southern migration. It has two broods each season. The nest is usually placed in some rocky ledge near the clear pebbly stream, or among some heap of stones, or perchance in a hole which the bird finds in a neighbouring bank, where the gentle murmuring of waters may serve as an accompaniment to its pleasing song. The eggs are of a yellowish grey tint, with dashes of a darker colour.

The Yellow Wagtail* (*Motacilla flava*) frequents downs and open arable lands, and is very similar in its habits to the grey species. It builds on the ground, and its eggs are of a pale brown, marked with a darker hue. It is a migratory bird, arriving here in March; and its song is very sweet.

Besides the various songs of the birds already named as frequenters of well-watered lands, the call-notes and chirpings of several others may be heard in such scenes; and the low sweet notes of the Bearded Titmouse (*Calamophilus biarmicus*) in some

* The Yellow Wagtail is six inches and a half in length. Upper parts pale olive; wing and tail browner; whole under parts, as well as a streak over the eye, brilliant yellow: beak and feet black.

few places come sounding from the reeds, "like a little silver bell," which sends its clear ringing tones far away over the grassy meadow; and the merry hurried song of the Marsh Titmouse (*Parus palustris*) falls there upon the ear. Here, too, the black-headed Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schœniclus*) comes in company with many of its fellows to seek its food and rear its young among the reeds and long grasses of the stream, and sings its song as if in too great a hurry to enunciate it fully. It is often said to be one of our few night singers, but we cannot claim for it this distinction; and it is probable that the notes of the sedge warbler, heard during night from the reeds, have been mistaken for those of the bunting. But it is no great singer at the best of times, and only deserves a slight mention in our enumeration of singing birds.

CHAPTER IV.

NIGHTINGALE—BLACKCAP—GARDEN WARBLER—WHITETHROAT—LESSER WHITETHROAT.

FLOWERS are blooming and green boughs are waving, and summer is come. The cuckoo's voice has long been heard over the hills, as a never-failing token of spring, and we were ready to hail it in the words of our oldest English ballad,—

> "Cuckoo, Cuckoo,
> Well singest thou cuckoo,
> Mayest thou never cease."

But the sweetest of all our wild singers has come with the summer to give us a music far richer than that of the cuckoo's unvarying tones. The brown Nightingale* (*Philomela luscinia*) is singing now, and the clear loud notes, changing ever

* The Nightingale is about six inches and a half in length. Whole upper parts chestnut-brown; under parts dull greyish-white; beak and feet brown.

as the song proceeds, fill the wood with their echoes, and are answered repeatedly by kindred voices in far distant trees.

"If, the quiet brooklet leaving,
Up the stony vale I wind;
Haply half in fancy grieving
For the shades I leave behind;
By the dusty wayside drear,
Nightingales, with joyous cheer,
Sing, my sadness to reprove,
Gladlier than in cultured grove.

"Where the thickest boughs are twining
Of the greenest darkest tree,
There they plunge—the light declining,
All may hear, and none may see:
Fearless of the passing hoof,
Hardly will they fleet aloof;
So they live, in modest ways,
Trust entire, and ceaseless praise."

Thus sings the author of the "Christian Year," of our nightingale; and all who have dwelt in places frequented by this bird, have paused to listen to its minstrelsy, sounding from the wood or shrubbery which bordered the highway. Not alone when the shadows of evening have brought their grey colouring to the wood or field, is that strain to be heard; but even at the brightest hour

of morning, when, if we look upward, we may espy the small singer sitting on the bough, and mark the swelling of its throat, as it pours forth the full tide of song.

But the song of the bird is so sweet in all its changes, and so loud too, that one can hardly believe it is uttered by so small a minstrel. Sometimes when one would fain sleep, that song has, in spite of our drowsiness, compelled us to listen. Now it seemed so plaintive, so deeply tender, as to justify the epithets of "melancholy bird" with which poets of all ages have so lavishly endowed the singer. But listen for awhile, and that melody has changed, and the "merry nightingale," the epithet of Chaucer, seems more appropriate, and we can for a moment believe with Coleridge,—

"A melancholy bird! oh idle thought,
In nature there is nothing melancholy;
But some night-wandering man, whose heart was pierced
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,
(And so, poor wretch, fill'd all things with himself,
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
Of his own sorrow,) he, and such as he,
First named these notes a melancholy strain;
And many a poet echoes the conceit.

"We may not thus profane
Nature's sweet voices, always full of love
And joyance! 'tis the merry nightingale,
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music.

Far and near,
In wood and thicket, over the wide grove
They answer and provoke each other's songs,
With skirmish and capricious passagings,
And murmurs musical, and swift jug, jug,
And one low piping sound, more sweet than all,
Stirring the air with such wild harmony,
That should you close your eyes, you might almost
Forget it was not day."

The low piping melodious strain which the poet describes as varying the jug, jug, jug of the nightingale, is well expressed by its rustic term of blowing. But most persons who have listened often to the bird, will admit with the son of the poet, Hartley Coleridge, that at times, at least,

"Ne'er on earth, was sound of mirth
So like to melancholy."

Both old and modern poets have been undoubtedly influenced by their classic associations, in pro-

nouncing the song of the nightingale a sad one; yet the oldest of all, again and again, expressed its song by similar epithets, and from Homer downwards, many have told the same tale, or, as our Coleridge would have it, "echoed the conceit." Homer spoke of the tawny nightingale, that complains in leafy shades; and Hesiod and Virgil have similar allusions. Horace calls it the sad, the grief-stricken, the love-lorn bird; and in later years Petrarch represented it as lamenting, and Tasso as deploring. The Provençal and French poetry, as Hallam has remarked, "became filled with monotonous common-places, among which the tedious descriptions of spring, and the everlasting nightingale, are eminently to be reckoned;" and from the poetry of the Troubadours might be selected abundant passages, in which our bird was singing the saddest of songs. Sir Philip Sydney tells of the nightingale, which

> "Sings out her woes, a thorne her song-book making."

And the whole poem, commonly attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh, but which more probably came from the pen of Richard Barnfield, describes the poor bird as "all forlorn" and singing the "dolefullest ditty," *till, as he says*—

"Her grief so lively shown,
Made me think upon my own."

But, however the question of its sadness may be viewed, all will agree that the song of the nightingale is the best and sweetest, that it has the most variety, and the greatest compass, of that of any of the minstrels of the wood. Sixteen burdens are said to be clearly reckoned in this song, which are well determined by the first and last notes. Nor does this bird, like our other songsters, ever repeat itself. It gives us something original at each passage, or if it "resumes the same, it is always with new accents and added embellishments." The editor of Cuvier's "Règne Animal" says, that the bird can "sustain the song uninterrupted during twenty seconds; and the sphere which its voice can fill is at least a mile in diameter. Song is so peculiarly the attribute of this species, that even the female possesses it; less strong and varied, it is true, than that of the male; but as to the rest, entirely resembling it; even in its dreaming sleep, the nightingale warbles."

It will, perhaps, rather amuse the reader to see in what manner that good observer of birds, Bechstein, describes, in written characters, the

rich variety of our bird's notes, though we imagine that Coleridge's poetic description of the singing will, after all, better convey some idea of it, to any who may never have chanced to listen to the nightingale's song. Happily only the task of penning it down, falls upon the writer, or the difficulties of pronouncing it might deter from any effort. "Tioû, tioû, tioû, tioû—Spe, tioû, squa—Tiô, tiô, tiô, tiô, tiô, tiô, tio, tix—Coutio, coutio, coutio, coutio—Squô, squô, squô, squô—Tzu, tzu, tzu, tzu, tzu, tzu, tzu, tzu, tzu, tzi—Corror, tiou, squa, pipiqui—Zozozoz

But turning from the description of the strain thus written down by our enthusiastic German, we may pause to inquire how it is that the song is really so mellow. Syme has remarked, that the notes of soft-billed birds, in general, are "finely-toned, mellow and plaintive; while those of the hard-billed species are characterised by sprightliness, cheerfulness, and rapidity." This difference, he says, proceeds from the construction of the vocal organs. "As a large pipe of an organ produces a more deep and mellow-toned note than a small pipe, so the windpipe of the nightingale, which is wider than that of the canary, sends forth a deeper and more mellow-toned note." Thus the soft round mellow notes of this delicious singer, are to be ascribed to the width of the windpipe.

The nightingale comes to our island at the close of April or the beginning of May, and quits us for southern climates at the end of August or commencement of September. The male birds arrive a few days before the females, and no sooner do these last reach the woods than a welcome of loud song greets their coming. These songs by day and night may be heard in full chorus during

May and June; but after this time the voice of the nightingale seems gone, and when his mate no longer needs its cheering influences a strange croaking noise succeeds, as if our bird were hoarse from the effects of cold; varied occasionally by a snapping noise made with the beak, which would seem to be a tone of anger or defiance. Now and then, during August, the young male birds which were hatched in the preceding spring, seem warbling as if practising their songs against another summer.

The nightingale, frequent as it is in many counties, is very local in its distribution. It is abundant in the southern part of England, and is well known in Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Berkshire, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Essex. It is rarely found in the middle and northern counties, except in one or two spots in Yorkshire, where it is described as somewhat more frequent, and in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire; and Lancashire, as well as in Cornwall and Devonshire, it seems unknown. There are no nightingales in Ireland, and if any are ever seen in Wales, they are but occasional visitors to the southern counties. Many attempts have been made to introduce the bird in various spots, and

though little success attended the efforts, yet Mr. Sweet considers that there is no doubt that the experiment might be made successfully in any place where there was a good cover of underwood, and plenty of insects, if the eggs were hatched by any of the tribe to which they are nearly related. He thinks that the Redstart would be a good parent.

The nightingale is naturally a timid and retiring bird, haunting the thick foliage of the woods, or the deep recesses of some copse with a good growth of shrubs. The neighbourhood of a purling stream seems preferred by it, and it delights on a hill side where a natural echo is found to the song. The nest is skilfully concealed in some thick bushes not far from the ground, or is placed on the ground in a little hole, which the builder can find adapted to its purpose. It is loosely composed, so much so, that, as Mr. Yarrell observes, it is generally necessary to pass a piece of thread or string several times around it, before removing it, if one wishes to preserve its natural form. It is made by placing a few dead leaves of the oak or hornbeam in the hollow, with dried grasses; and when near streams, with pieces of rushes; while

the lining is made of fibrous roots. Sometimes the "poet bird" displays an extraordinary taste in the selection of materials, and Mr. Murray describes a nest which he found, composed wholly of those skeleton leaves, which in spring and autumn lie scattered in woods and gardens, consisting only of the fibres, from which the green portion has been separated by sun and rain. As these leaves are not to be found everywhere, the little bird must have taken some pains to gratify her taste in arranging her home. The eggs are four or five in number, of an olive brown colour. The young birds make their appearance in June, after which we seldom hear the nightingale, or if he sings at all, it is with little spirit and vigour.

This bird has generally two or three favourite trees near its nest, where it sings its sweetest songs, keeping all the time a watchful eye on its family. In the course of about a fortnight after the nestlings are hatched, they are covered with feathers, and, though unable to fly, they will quit the nest, jumping from twig to twig, after the parent birds. Sometimes, when a wanderer through the wood comes near the well-guarded nest, the nightingale will practise some little art to wile him

away from the spot. A naturalist, who was one day tempted to enter a copse, in pursuit of an azure butterfly, was attracted by the melodies of a nightingale close at his side. "The singing," says Mr. Conway, "was in one continuous incessant and uninterrupted melody; there were none of those frequent breaks which are so characteristic of the song of the nightingale when heard at a little distance; it was one incessant warble. I can hardly call it a warble, either; it was one unceasing effort; so much so, that I stood perfectly astonished, and at a loss to conceive how it was possible for so small a creature to exert itself so mightily." This listener soon began to think that the nest must be near, and he determined to watch the bird closely in order to discover it. This, however, was a very difficult matter, and he was at one time nearly giving up his search as useless, for whenever he entered the copse, no matter from what opening, there was the sweet minstrel close by him, and hopping from spray to spray, and bush to bush, thus leading him round about the wood at its will. He had just desisted from the attempt, when, by accident, he found the nest, and he then perceived that whichever way

that song had led him, it was always away from the dwelling of the bird.

No bird is more easily caught than the nightingale. As it sings well in confinement, great numbers are taken during the first week after their arrival in this country, by the bird-catchers, especially in Surrey, as bird-fanciers consider the nightingale from that county to excel peculiarly in tone. This practice, of course, lessens considerably the chorus which would else be left to render the music of our woodlands delightful to the inhabitant of the Great Metropolis, who, after the cares and anxieties of city life, may wander during evening in the neighbourhood to listen to the soothing sounds of nature. It has been observed, too, that the nightingale, more than almost any other bird which builds near London, is liable to have its young ones destroyed by cats, as directly the morning dawns, the younglings commence such a perpetual clamour for food, that their enemy is attracted by it to the nest. The nightingale, when in captivity, will easily learn various airs whistled to it by the mouth, or played on a flageolet; but it loses, in so doing, its own exquisite song. It is, indeed, during its first year of confinement,

very apt to imitate any song which it may hear; so that those who keep this bird find it necessary to place it near a good singer of its own species, and by proper care and training, a nightingale may be kept in song for three months together. Mr. Yarrell informs us that he was told by a successful keeper of nightingales, that a bird of his had sung for one hundred and fourteen successive days. After one or two years of captivity, however, the execution begins to fail, and instead of one long melody, the song is broken into snatches. It is said that when this occurs if freedom is granted to the poor bird in the month of May, it will regain its rich sweet song, when, amid its natural haunts, it has breathed the invigorating air of the woods, and felt all its longings to fly and to migrate in its own power of accomplishment. In ordinary circumstances, a nightingale sings well for about five or six seasons, after which its voice becomes broken.

The nightingale is often so much attached to its owner when kindly treated, as that it will suffer none but its master or mistress to feed it; and it has been known to pine away and die, when tended by others. As it is thus exclusive in its

attachment, so it is exceedingly jealous if the caresses of its master are bestowed upon any rival bird. Nor is this the only form in which its jealousy exhibits itself. It cannot bear a rival singer. "His motto," says Mr. Kidd, "is, *Aut Cæsar, aut nullus*. He will admit no rival near the throne. Hence, to keep two of these birds in one room would be ridiculous. The same extraordinary failing prevails in most of our warblers. If out-done in song, they frequently fall dead from off their perches. Some of these rival musicians, be it known, do not weigh more than a quarter of an ounce. When, therefore, it is considered desirable to keep several nightingales, let each occupy a different apartment. By this precaution not any one of the birds will be put down or silenced, and each one will sing without having his temper ruffled. It is sometimes a hard matter to restore the serenity of these 'enraged musicians;' even then the rage smoulders."

The nightingale has been known to die of regret at the change of masters; while some, which have been offered liberty, and sent forth into the woods, have willingly come back to captivity. But this may arise from the great dislike to any change

which is so marked in the character of this bird. If only removed from its accustomed situation to another, even in the same apartment, it becomes restless and sad, and ceases its melody. It would dash itself to pieces if placed in an ordinary cage, where the light came to it on all sides; but when kept in shadow, it, in the course of time, consoles itself for its loss of liberty by singing and eating with remarkable voraciousness; yet a caged nightingale must ever be an object of commiseration.

The name of our bird is derived from night, and the Saxon *galan*, to sing. The Italians call it *Rossignuolo*, and the French *Rossignol*. It is the *Nachtigall* of the Germans. It is rather remarkable, that, though the nightingale is little known in Wales, Pennant has given the old Welsh word *Eos* among his list of its names.

The Eastern nightingale, the bulbul of the poets, whose love for the rose is so common an Oriental fable, like our bird, sings during night. Its voice is stronger, and can be heard at a far greater distance, but it wants the mellow roundness of tone of the sweet bird of our woods.

Second only in power and sweetness to the

song of the nightingale, is that of the Blackcap* (*Curruca atricapilla*), the rich notes of which reach us earlier in the spring, and are so gladsome, that the comparison of the old proverb, "As merry as a blackcap," seems very appropriate. The familiar name refers to the black patch on the head of the male bird, and the French call it *Fauvette, à tête noire*, while the Germans give it the name of *Monk* or *Moor*. The Mock-nightingale is another familiar appellation for this favourite little singer. Mr. Main, in his excellent account of the singing of various birds, thus describes our blackcap and its music. "It is," he says, "the contra-alto singer of the woodland choir. The fine, varied, joyous song of this emigrant is noticed by the most listless auditor; the strain occupies about three bars of triple time in the performance, and though very frequently repeated, is somewhat varied in every repetition. He begins with two or three short essays of double notes, gradually crescendo up to a loud and full

* The Blackcap is five inches and three quarters in length. Upper parts ashy brown, becoming grey on the back of the neck; upper half of the head black; chin, throat, and breast grey; belly white; beak horn colour; feet lead-grey. The female is larger than the male, and more tinged with brown; her head is chestnut instead of black.

swell of varied expression. One passage often occurs, as truly enunciated as if performed on an octave flute. The style and key of the song are nearly the same in all individuals, though some may be noticed to vary in style. I knew one bird that frequented the same spots of a wood for three summers, who signalised himself by an arrangement of notes very much excelling his brethren around. The blackcap is certainly the finest singer of the whole tribe of warblers, except the nightingale."

Nor is the author peculiar in his opinion of this value of the song; few well acquainted with the notes of our woods would differ from him. Though it has less volume and richness than that of the bird of night, yet it is more gay and sprightly, and, as Bechstein remarks, is more easy and flute-like in its tones than the strain of the nightingale; nor are there wanting some good judges of the singing of birds, who prefer the song of the blackcap to that of any other of our British woods. The night singing for which our Philomel is so remarkable, is not confined to it alone. The blackcap has a tune too for him whose course may lie through the country when night has far advanced, while the sedge-bird

sings from its reeds in the marsh, or the water ouzel is in full song by the banks where the silent waters are gliding onward to the sea. Good ornithologists, when listening to the strains of the blackcap at night, have mistaken them for those of the nightingale; and Mr. Dovaston once heard one, at night, singing so like that bird, that he asks whether it may not be possible that this blackcap, in his passage through the south of England, resting in the night, had heard the nightingale sing, and retained in its memory a portion of the song. Our blackcap is, indeed, often said to be a mocking-bird, from its peculiar power of imitating the strains of other songsters. It will give so exactly those of the thrush and swallow, that were the bird not seen, the most practised ear might be misled by the deception. Mr. Dovaston, who calls it the "Burns of birds," remarks that he has not only a perfectly original style of his own, but, like a poet of all genius, he sometimes hardly knows what he is about, and has, regardless of Aristotle and the unities, neither beginning, middle, nor end; while after the highest flights, he sometimes suddenly breaks off into his chat, chat, chat, of homeliest prose.

The melody of the blackcap may often be heard in the scantily-leaved woods of April, or in the parks and orchards, where, however, it contrives to screen itself from view, being of a remarkably shy and recluse nature. A month later, when the foliage is thicker, its song is more frequent, but it generally issues from some leafy covert, save when the bird believes itself to be quite alone, when it will sit on the very top of a tree, and pour forth its gladness, its throat swelling with the utterance. But if some lover of nature comes hither to search for the wild hyacinth or anemone, or to breathe the sweet odours of leaf or flower, or to delight in the harmony of the grove, away flies the blackcap among the trees, from branch to branch, till it is quite hidden. The female bird sings too, though less loudly, and a song may sometimes be heard from the nest, as the male bird shares with the female in the cares of rearing the young family. Though not quite so domestic as his companion, or capable of remaining with so much steady perseverance in one spot, yet he seems very happy, too, in taking his share of sitting on the eggs, and sings so loudly and sweetly out of his glad heart, that the song has sometimes led

to the discovery of the nest. When in captivity the bird's note is scarcely inferior to that carolled in the boughs; yet it seems hard to keep the little creature in confinement, for so strong is the instinct for migration, at the proper period, that the blackcap will then fall ill and die. And thus, those who take those wild creatures, and love them well, yet inflict upon them the saddest sorrows. If, at this time, the moon shines brightly into the room where the bird is hung, it becomes most sensibly affected, for it is on moonlight nights that these migratory journeys are commenced. In vain the poor bird flaps its wings, and makes every restless and distracted effort to escape from the cage; it is compelled to endure the anguish thus often thoughtlessly inflicted, and perhaps to perish from its inward agony of emotion.

Of all our wild birds, none is known to be of a more affectionate disposition than our little blackcap. This is shown when in captivity by its love to the person who attends it. At the approach of its owner, it will utter a call kept for him alone, and the voice becomes quite expressive of tenderness towards him. It will rush against the bars of the cage as if to reach him more nearly, and

accompany its little cries of recognition by a joyous clapping of its wings. Bechstein had one, which, during the winter, he kept in a hothouse, and which he fed, whenever he entered, with a meal-worm. Immediately on the entrance of its master, the little bird would place itself near the jar in which these worms were placed, and if he pretended not to notice it, it would fly about, passing continually under his nose, then go back to its post, and then repeat the flight, striking its master with its wing, till its impatient wishes were gratified.

Nor is the affectionate character of the black-cap shown only to man. Its love for its mate is very tender; and its solicitude for her and its young most marked. If deprived of its liberty with its family, it will continually feed the young ones, and even force its distressed mate to eat, when sorrow has taken away from her all appetite. In the wild state, and when the little ones quit the nest, they will all follow the parent birds, hopping from branch to branch, in company; and at night, the whole family perch on one branch, a parent bird at each end, guarding the young ones which are placed in the middle. They seem to

dislike cold, for they all press closely against each other; and the blackcap, when kept in a cage, spreads some of its feathers over its feet to keep them warm.

One cannot help feeling a great liking for a little bird so gentle, and capable of exhibiting so much attachment. We instinctively prefer it to the species less susceptible of this. We know that it is not the result of thought, but the natural impulse of the kind; and that the wild waywardness of the cuckoo, and its consignment of all care of its young to the stranger bird, is as much its implanted instinct as is the winning disposition of the blackcap; but, as it is in our regard to individuals of the human family, after making every allowance in unpleasing dispositions, either on the score of natural and hereditary temper, or of ill-training, so we still turn away from the unlovely, to give our regards to the loving and the loveable.

The blackcap usually arrives in our land about the first week in April, and leaves us in September, one or two lingering, now and then, as late as October. Directly it arrives, it begins looking about very carefully for a good place for its nest,

and is exceedingly particular in this selection. Gardens, orchards, and thick hedges, are its favourite haunts; and it builds among the interlacing boughs of the bramble-bush, or among the thick branches of the hawthorn, whose boughs are now in leaf, and will soon be adorned with the scented clusters of spring. The nest is rarely found above two or three feet from the ground, and is made of the dried stems of the common goosegrass or cleavers, and a small portion of wool; and lined with fibrous roots, occasionally interspersed with a few long briers, or studded on the outside with tufts of some green moss. Four or five, or sometimes six eggs are deposited in it. They are of a reddish-brown tint, mottled with a darker hue, and sometimes spotted with tiny dots of an ash colour. The female bird is larger than her mate, and the top of the head is dark-brown instead of black.

The blackcap is chiefly a fruit-eating bird, though sometimes feeding on insects, and taking them very dexterously when on the wing. On its first arrival there are few berries to offer it a repast, save those of the ivy, and it is among the dark-green boughs of this plant that the earliest

song of the bird is often uttered. It is especially fond of these berries, so much so that the Italians, among whom it resides constantly, know it by the name of *caponera d'edera*,—hedera, or edera, or hedra, being the name of the ivy in several European countries. In our own land, when the ivy berries are over, the larvæ of various moths and insects are lying rolled up in the young buds of trees and flowers, and there the blackcap finds a meal for itself and young ones until the summer has ripened the fruits. But when the currants glisten from the bough, and the strawberries from the bed, and the glossy cherries are crimsoning among the leaves, our bird knows how to turn to account the care of the gardener, and deliberately helps itself to the very finest and sweetest of the fruits, as if to repay itself for its destruction of the insects which, but for its efforts, might have fed on them instead. There is no sort of fruit or berry which comes amiss to the bird save those which are poisonous; and when the black fruits of the elder-tree appear, the blackcaps find a delightful harvest. When they have cleared the trees of these, they depart to other lands.

This bird is one of those known as the *beccafico*,

and, notwithstanding its small size, and its sweet singing, is highly prized by epicures on the continent. It is so shy and suspicious, however, that it is not easily lured into a trap. It is found, during summer, throughout Great Britain; and occurs frequently in the greater portion of Europe, being widely diffused through the northern and eastern countries. In Madeira, as well as at Rome, it appears to be permanent.

Another species of this genus, the Garden Warbler* (*Curruca hortensis*), is the Fauvette of Buffon and other French writers, and is commonly called, in our country, the Olive Fauvet, or Garden Fauvet, and sometimes the Greater Petty-chaps. Buffon says that, of all the inhabitants of the woods of his native land, these warblers are the most numerous and agreeable. Lively and nimble, always in motion, they seem occupied only with play and pleasure; and, as he observes, it is very amusing to see them pursue each other in sport, for "their attacks are gentle, and their combats end with a song." A very sweet song it is, and

* The Garden Warbler is nearly six inches in length. Upper parts hair-brown; under parts dull whitish; beak and feet purplish-brown.

GARDEN WARBLER

little inferior to that of the blackcap, being rich and flute-like in its tones. It is often heard from the tree of the shrubbery, or from that of the large garden, where, amid the foliage, the bird may sing unseen, or gambol about among the trees chasing its companions or the winged insect. It is very elegant and graceful in its movements, but will rarely give us an opportunity of watching it, except at a distance, though it is abundant, not only in gardens and shrubberies, but in copses and hedgerows: like the blackcap, it is migratory, and comes and departs at about the same season as that bird. William Howitt has a word in favour of it, and other of our little birds:—

> "Come ye, come ye to the green green wood,
> Loudly the blackbird is singing;
> The squirrel is feasting on blossom and beech,
> And the curled fern is springing:
> Here you may sleep, in the wood so deep,
> Where the moon is so warm and so weary;
> And sweetly awake, when the sun, through the brake,
> Bids the fauvette and whitethroat sing cheery."

Shy and wary as it is in its wild state, the garden warbler soon becomes reconciled to confinement, and is described by Mr. Sweet as one of the most delightful and *pleasing* birds that can be ima-

gined. The long-continued song, "wild, rapid, and irregular in time and tone," is sung cheerfully when the bird is placed in a large cage with other birds; it flies and plays about all day long, but, fortunately for it, it is rarely chosen for a cage bird in England. It is the true beccafico of the Italians, so celebrated as a luxurious food. Mr. Broderip quotes an enthusiastic eulogy of this species from "the Professor, who gave to the world the Phisiologie du Goût," which may be thus translated:—"Amongst the smaller birds, the beccafico is unquestionably the first. He fattens, at least, as well as the redbreast or the ortolan; and Nature has bestowed on him besides, a slight bitterness, and an unrivalled perfume, so exquisite, that they engage, fill, and beatify all the gustative powers. If the beccafico were of the size of a pheasant, he would certainly be purchased at the price of an acre of land. It is greatly to be lamented that this privileged bird is so seldom seen at Paris. Some few, indeed, arrive there, but they are wanting in that fatness which constitutes their whole merit; and one may say, that they hardly resemble at all those which are to be seen in the *eastern or southern* departments of France."

What wonder, if, after such praises of our little bird, the epicure longs to add to his delights a dish of the garden warbler! Unfortunately, an excessive attention to the palate soon destroys all the finer tastes, and the charms of music must yield to those of the luxuries of the table.

Our graceful bird delights in closely-embowered and shady places, and here it sings its song, and builds its nest. This is usually put in some thick bush, at no great height from the ground. Mr. Yarrell found one in the midst of a row of garden-peas and the sticks which supported them; and saw another lying among some tares in the open field. The nest is made of grasses, dried stalks of plants, and moss, and lined with a few hairs and the fibres of small roots; the edges being wound about with spiders' webs. The eggs are greenish-white, marked all over with pale ash-grey and olive-brown spots and streaks.

The garden warbler will eat our currants and cherries in their season, and take a meal from the berries on the elder-bough. Its chief food, however, consists of insects, which it flits after and catches with much dexterity. As this bird leaves

us in September, it hardly waits to experience, the words of the poet—

> "The small birds how they fare,
> When mother Autumn fills their beaks with corn,
> Filch'd from the careless Amalthea's horn;
> And how the wood-berries and worms provide
> Without their pains, when earth hath nought beside
> To answer their small wants."

But far more common than even the garden warbler is the Whitethroat* (*Curruca cinerea*), another bird, called also Fauvette, the Fauvette grise, or Grisette of Buffon, which is, too, a migratory species, arriving in Britain at the season of love and hope, of budding trees and flowery meadows. It is here by the end of April, and every one used to the country has marked its white throat and grey chest and black-tipped head. Notwithstanding that our rural retreats receive at this season a great accession of songsters, the hurried but sweet song of the whitethroat is no small addition to the concert, and none the less valuable that it is heard so

* The Whitethroat is five inches and a half in length. Upper parts reddish brown, greyish on the head and neck; under parts whitish, tinged from the breast downward with rose-colour; beak and feet brown.

often. The bird seems quite a musical enthusiast, uttering its notes apparently under the influence of great excitement, the throat much distended and throbbing all the while, and the feathers on the crown of its head raised up so as to form a crested tuft, while the vibrating wings and tail mark the eagerness of the singer. Sometimes it flies off, wheeling round and round with a quivering motion, and singing sweetly at the same time, till having performed several circles in the air, it comes back to the spot whence it started, and finishes the song. The heat of summer now comes on, and most birds are silent for awhile, till cooler hours arrive; but not so with our hearty singer, for its voice may be heard alone amid the general hush, and when a drowsiness seems to have come over all the living things around, while it is also continued long after the twilight of evening. Mr. Sweet, who has contributed so much to our knowledge of the habits and manners of the small birds, was very fond of the whitethroat, and says, that it is one of the most delightful and pleasing birds that can be imagined, if kept in a large cage with others, when its antics and friskings are most amusing. He

ascertained that there exists in different individuals a great variety as to the quality of the song, not only when in confinement, but also when wild in the woods; and he considers that the singing of a good whitethroat is little inferior to that of a blackcap. This writer had one in his possession for eleven years, and says that it was, at the time of his writing, in as good health and sang as well as ever, and that no song need be louder, sweeter, or more varied. "It is," he says, "of the same temper as the nightingale, never suffering itself to be outrivalled. It will indeed sing for hours together against a nightingale, now in the beginning of January, and will not allow itself to be outdone; when the nightingale raises its voice, it does the same, and tries its utmost to get above it; sometimes in the midst of its song it will run up to the nightingale and stretch out its neck, as if in defiance, and whistle as loud as it can, staring it in the face; if the nightingale attempts to peck it away, it is in an instant flying round the aviary, and singing all the time."

Our whitethroat has so many familiar country names, as to suggest the idea that the bird is *a general* favourite. It is called Whey-beard,

Wheetie-why, Churr, Muft, Beardie, Whattie, Charlie Muftie, Peggy Whitethroat, Whautie, and Muggy Cut-throat. One of its most common provincial names, Nettle-creeper, arises from its habit of frequenting hedge-banks, the sides of woods, or grassy lanes, where the brambles trail over the ground, and the bracken and the nettles gather in abundance. It is among large coarse herbage of this kind that its nest is hidden; and a low bush, or a tangled thicket of grass and nettles, is a favourite spot; the nest rarely being placed more than a foot or two above the ground. The outer part is formed almost entirely of dried grass stems, and it is lined with flowering grass stems of a finer description. The eggs are four or five in number, and are white, spotted and speckled with ash brown.

The whitethroat clears our rose bushes, honeysuckles, and other plants, of many of the aphides which gather on them; and is of much use too in destroying caterpillars, of which it is particularly fond. It is partial also to flies, though less clever in catching them than are some birds. But it does not confine itself to insect diet, and it must be acknowledged that a little party of these

fauvettes, composed of the parent birds and their young, will make sad havoc among the currants, cherries and raspberries, if their nest happens to be placed near a garden or orchard where these fruits are growing. Elderberries and blackberries are a favourite food, but the latter have hardly ripened before the birds are away to more congenial climes, and better stores of provision. The greater number depart quite early in September, but a few stragglers may be seen late in that month.

The Lesser Whitethroat* (*Curruca sylviella*) visits this island at the same period as its allied species, but is by no means a common bird. It is called also Babbling Warbler, and its French and Latin names both allude, too, to its song. In Germany it is termed *Das Müllerchen*, or little miller, because some clacking notes may be heard in its strain. These notes are very distinct, and are therefore often thought to be the only song of the bird, especially as it is, from its habit of frequent-

* The Lesser Whitethroat is five inches and a quarter in length. Upper parts blackish-brown; sides and flanks grey; under parts white tinged with red on the belly; the outer feather of the tail is white; beak black; feet lead-grey.

ing copses and thick hedgerows, and from being somewhat uncommon, at least in Britain, not very often heard. Bechstein, however, who is an excellent authority in these matters, says, that the song, though weak, is so soft, so melodious, and so varied, that it surpasses other warblers. He adds, that while warbling in an undertone, in continuation, it is perpetually hopping about the bushes; but when going to utter its tones of clap, clap, clap, it stops, and employs the whole strength of the larynx to pronounce this syllable. When caged, and by itself in a room, it rarely utters the clacking tones, and at that time its voice is peculiarly sweet and agreeable. Both there, and in its wild bough, its warbling is almost incessant, so as to deserve its name of babbler.

This bird usually builds its nest among brambles and low underwood. This is generally formed of strong coarse grasses, lined inside with some finer kinds, with fibrous roots and horsehair. The eggs are smaller than those of the common whitethroat; sparingly spotted and speckled, chiefly at the larger end, with light brown and grey. They are about five in number.

This bird is *very* generally diffused over the

temperate and warmer parts of Europe and Asia. Its manners and habits are similar to those of the larger species, and like it, its food consists of insects, varied with berries. It frequents thick copses and hedgerows, and sometimes may be heard or seen on the top of a tall elm or other tree.

CHAPTER V.

WHEATEAR—STONECHAT—WHINCHAT.

If in spring and early summer there is a richness and beauty in our woods and meadows, so too, at these seasons, the wide-spread downs have attractions of their own. Desolate indeed they seem in winter, as the wind sweeps sullenly over their short grassy turf, bowing down the slender green twigs of the broom, or the sturdier branches of the ling, and making a moan through the stiff spiny boughs of the furze. We can then see little there that has a brighter tinge than the grass, save an occasional blossom on the furze, which is of paler yellow and less wide expansion than the bloom of summer; or we may look upon a tuft of emerald moss, or a bright whitish grey lichen hanging around the trunk of a solitary tree, or a gay orange or pale yellow fungus at its base; or perchance we may stoop to gather the little crimson mushroom-like object which glitters

among the grass, or the tiny vases of the scarlet cup-moss growing there like masses of coral. The silence that reigns on the common is far more dreary than that of the woods; for when it is interrupted by the winds, these bring not the wild and varied melodies which come winding along the vistas of the woodlands, as through the aisles of a cathedral, nor is the robin so often on the down to chant its winter song. And as the wind murmurs in low tones, or comes in sullen gusts, and as we cast the eye over the wide unsheltered waste, we feel that winter has here done its worst.

Yet how gladsome in spring-time is all that wide common, when a blue sky is hanging over it, and sunshine is gilding its innumerable blades of grass. Now the gorse has its thousands of flowers of brightest gold, and daisies cluster in multitudes, and the little milkwort raises its blossoms of blue or richest pink above the lowly sward; and the bright germander speedwell with its eye of blue, and the celandine with its star of gold, are but the heralds of the purple heaths, and the blue harebells, and the sweet wild thyme, and the bright golden broom flowers which, in

the later summer, shall make it more beautiful still.

He who would hear to perfection the song of the birds, which arises like a psalm of praise from the open down, should wander thither in the early morning. Here he may find the wheatears by hundreds, and as merry and musical as he could desire, though the song is very low and sweet, and must be listened to in silence to be heard at all. These birds are very abundant in some parts of Britain, and pretty generally diffused over our commons. They are also spread widely throughout Europe, are very plentiful in Holland, and are especially frequent on the borders of the Mediterranean, while they are found also at the extreme north of Europe. They are very handsome birds, but of a wild and shy character, hastening from the coming footstep by running lightly over the grass, or taking a number of rapid flights from one spot to another, at a little distance from the ground; only flying higher during their migration. The timid birds will, if disturbed, utter a sound which resembles the words "far, far;" and if one should come unexpectedly upon the mother bird, while sitting

on her nest, the air resounds with the cry of "titreu, titreu." Often the spots where the wheatears congregate are so barren, that if they needed the shelter of a bush, they could not even find a bramble of any size or a furze shrub to cover them; but they conceal their nest, and that most skilfully too, in fissures in the ground, or among clods or heaps of stones, and if some old wall is near they will hide it at its base, placing it so securely that even those accustomed to the habits of the bird, are often unable to discover it. Sometimes the nest is hidden in a chalk or gravel pit, and on some downs the birds avail themselves of a deserted rabbit warren, where just at the entrance they build their home. This structure is large and composed of grasses, wool, moss, and of feathers and scraps of rabbit's down which are spread about the common, and it usually contains six pale-blue eggs. Small pieces of brake generally lie strewed in little heaps around, and thus betray the home to the wanderer. The wheatear is very cunning in luring away any who may approach its young family, and if a passer over the common comes towards the nest, the bird makes a short flight to mislead him, and when she

sees him some way off, makes a circular turn and regains the nest.' These birds are so often to be seen perched on clods of earth, that the French term the wheatear,* *Motteux*, from *motte*, a clod. Our country people call this bird by a variety of names, as Horsematch, Fallow-finch, Fallow-chat, Fallow-smith, Fallow-smiter, Whitetail, Stone Chucker, Chickell, and Chackbird. It is the *Saxicola œnanthe* of the ornithologist.

As autumn approaches large flocks of wheatears are congregated on the downs of Sussex and Kent, whither they have come, singly, or in pairs, from various inland heaths, to assemble for their departure. And now is their season of especial danger, for valued as they are for the table, and called the English Ortolan, they become at this season, in consequence of their numbers, a ready prey to the shepherds who are keeping their flocks

* The Wheatear is six inches and a half in length. The head, shoulders, and back are light grey; wings black; tail-feathers white on their basal parts and black at their extremities; the forehead, a line over the eye, and the rump, white; the cheeks and ear-coverts black; whole under parts buff, very pale on the belly; beak and feet black. In winter the grey of the head and shoulders becomes rusty brown; the wing-feathers are tipped with rusty; and the buff of the under parts becomes much richer and brighter.

on these downs. They are then in good condition for the table, and so suspicious are they, that the smallest alarm, even the shadow of a passing cloud, will induce them to run into the traps which are laid for them. These traps are of the most simple description, yet a shepherd has been known by their means to capture eighty-four dozen in a day, six or seven hundred of the traps being overlooked by one man and his boy. Pennant states, that in his time, about eighteen hundred and forty dozen were annually caught on the Eastbourne downs, where they still form a profitable trade to the shepherds. Immense numbers of birds arrive there, and at Beachy Head, daily, during the months of August and September. Nor can we, though we pity the birds, deprecate the practice of taking them, since the lower orders of creatures were made for the service of man, and the wheatears leave behind them no young ones to perish of cold and hunger for want of the care of the parent. But when, in the earlier months, the sportsman takes his gun to our moorlands, and brings down the bird which has a young brood, the practice is a very cruel one, *for the* bird is too much injured by the shot to be

fit for eating, and the misery of the survivors is very great.

Large numbers of these wheatears are preserved and sent to London, but many are sold to the innkeepers and others, and eaten in the neighbourhood of the downs. They are wrapped in vine-leaves and roasted, and their flavour is very delicious, especially that of young birds.

The food of the wheatears consists of various insects, particularly those of the beetle tribe, and when they are kept in confinement they need a very large supply. Wild and shy as they are in their native haunts, ready to run under the first clod when approached, yet they become tame and very interesting when reared in the house, and keep up a perpetual singing—singing on even during night, if a light is in the room. Mr. Sweet says of our bird: "It has a very pleasant, variable, and agreeable song, different from all other birds, which in confinement it continues all the winter. When a pair of them are kept in a large cage or aviary, it is very amusing to see them at play with each other, flying up and down, and spreading their long wings in a curious manner, dancing and singing at the same time. I have very little

doubt but a young bird, brought up from the nest, might be taught to talk, as they are very imitative."

The wheatear is general throughout Britain. and is very widely diffused during summer over Europe, being particularly abundant on the northern shores of the Mediterranean. It has been seen very far north, and Sir J. Ross says of it, "One of these little birds was observed flying round the ship in Felix Harbour, 70° N., 91° 35′ W., on the second of May, 1830, and was found dead alongside, the next morning: having arrived before the ground was sufficiently uncovered to enable it to procure its food, it had perished from want. It is the only instance of this bird having been met with in Arctic America, in the course of our several expeditions to those regions."

Another bird, which is often to be heard and seen by those who ramble over the moorlands, is the Stonechat* (*Saxicola rubicola*), but this prefers the downs well sprinkled with furze and other

* The Stonechat is five inches and a quarter in length. Upper parts black, except the rump and the tertial-coverts which are white; wing-feathers edged with brown; chin and throat black; sides of the neck white; breast rich chestnut-brown, lightening to buff on the lower parts; beak and feet black. In winter the

bushes, to those which are more barren and stony. This bird is well named stone chatter, or stone clink, for it keeps up a chattering noise from the stone where it perches itself, or while flitting about from one golden furze-bush to another in short quick flights. Its clicking note is described by Buffon as resembling the word "ouïstrata," and is like the sound of two stones struck together, or rather that of a stone thrown upon ice. Both the bird and its note are, however, well known by those who love to ramble among the broom and furze and heather, for we can hardly fail to see it there during the summer months, and its manners are such as would attract the attention even of those who rarely notice birds. It delights in sloping grounds, where briers and brambles and furze are plentiful, and where the sunshine rests during a great part of the summer day. It seems one of the merriest and most agile of birds, hopping about from one bush to another, as if seeking for something which it cannot find, or flitting off in pursuit of an insect, and the

whole of the dark plumage becomes broadly tipped with rusty-brown; the breast and belly are paler than before. The colours of the female are not very different from this condition.

moment after swallowing it, singing a song of pleasure. Now and then it rests from its almost continual movements, and perching on the top of a rock or stone, or on the extremity of some branch, pours forth a melody which, though short, comes to us, as we lie on the green sward, as a chaunt in praise of summer and sunshine. But even ere the song seems hardly finished, away flits the bird, rising in the air by sudden springs, agitating perpetually its tail and its wings, then coming down "in a sort of pirouette," and now appearing and disappearing continually. The movement of the tail has been compared to that of the clapper of a mill, hence one of the rustic names for the stonechat, in France, is *Traquet.*

If we observe this bird during May, we are amused by its various windings about the place of its nest. This is built among the furze or briers, or among stone walls, and is made of such materials as the heath land yields, dried grass, a little moss, and hairs for the lining. Over this nest the male stonechat hovers, singing all the while his twittering song, and never entering it directly, but traversing different bushes to reach it; then emerging again so cautiously, and winding so skilfully

among the bushes, that when we see it with a worm in its mouth, we may know very well that the bush which the bird enters is not that in which we may find its home, though probably it is not far off. The eggs are five or six in number, of a grey colour, marked at the larger end with small spots of reddish brown. The young ones, when hatched, are covered with down; and so great is the solicitude of the parent birds respecting them, that they make a perpetual clamour by calling to them, nor do they ever quit them till they are capable of providing for themselves.

The stonechat is either a constant resident with us, or partially migratory, some only of the birds reared in our downs in spring, leaving them in autumn. If the weather be severe it is probable that the parent birds also take refuge in enclosed grounds or shrubberies; or some of them may go further to find a still better spot for warmth and food. Certainly those who are accustomed to watch the stonechats on the moorlands, during summer, miss them much when winter comes, but how far they may travel is not fully ascertained.

Whatever may be the case with the stonechat, however, there is no doubt that its companion, the

Whinchat* (*Saxicola rubetra*), quite forsakes our island during the winter, seeking a warmer clime, before the bleak winds have blown away the furze blossoms, or borne the red leaf from the bramble on the downs. The bilberry and blackberry are ripening before it goes, and it pecks at them in their red state very voraciously, so that one of its common country names is the Blackberry eater. From its favourite haunts being the furzy commons, it is also called the Furze-chat and Furze-wren, and it is the *Grand Traquet* of the French. The manners and mode of flight of this bird are very similar to those of the stonechat, as it flits about in an equally restless manner, from one bush to another, uttering continually its clicking cry of "u-tick, u-tick." Its song is sweet, though the notes are very rapid, and it is often sung while the bird hovers over the furze-bush, or sits

* The Whinchat is nearly five inches in length. Whole upper parts mottled with light and dark brown, the feathers having dark centres; a conspicuous streak of white over each eye reaching from the beak to the nape; the tail-feathers white at their base; a white spot at the edge of the wing; under parts buff, becoming fawn-colour on the breast, where it is separated from the dark-brown of the cheeks and neck by a margin of white; beak and feet black.

:ched on the summit of one of the branches. :chstein compares it to that of the goldfinch. The ıg greets us at early morning, and after having ırred forth its strains during almost the whole ;, the furze-chat still sings it during twilight, l sometimes even at night. Mr. Sweet, whose :cessful training of many of our wild songsters well known, was very fond of the whinchat. ı had one which he had reared from the nest. would sing through the livelong day and during ı night, and had so good an ear that it would st successfully imitate the notes of several other ls. It sang the songs of the whitethroat, red- rt, willow-warbler, missel-thrush and nightin- e. So fond was it of the notes of the missel- ush, and so clearly did it imitate them, from ıring one in a garden near, that the harsh loud nds became unbearable in a room. "It was tainly," says Mr. Sweet, "the best bird I ever ıt of any kind, singing the whole year through, . varying its song continually. Its only fault ı its strong voice. At last our favourite was ned out of its cage by a mischievous servant, a cold winter day, when we were from home about an *hour*. As we could not entice it

back, it most probably died of the cold, or took its flight to warmer regions."

This bird is not a hardy one, and cannot well bear the cold, so that it could have no chance if turned adrift during the severe season. Doubtless many of our resident birds must die of cold and hunger, whenever the winters are unusually rigorous: yet it is seldom that we find their dead remains. Now and then the body of a dead bird lies among the leaves of the wood, or we see a few of the whitened bones which were its framework; but even this is not often. Probably when the poor little creatures feel the benumbing influences of winter, they go away, moping and dispirited, to some of the thickest recesses to die; and no sooner has life quitted them, than beetles and other living creatures prey on their body, and rid the earth of the nuisance which would arise from decomposing carcases.

The whinchat arrives in the south of England by the middle of April, and usually builds her nest about a week or two later than the stonechat. The nest is much like that of this bird, and is formed of dry grass stalks and a little moss; the *lining being* made of finer grasses. It is usually

placed on the ground, and is not easily discovered, for it is often hidden among the lower branches of the furze-bush, or amid the tangling branches of the low hawthorn, or of the bramble which winds its flexible sprays far over the bank. Nor is this concealment deemed enough by the birds, for dry grasses and pieces of the surrounding herbage are placed about the nest so as to effectually cover it, and it can be found only by watching the birds on their way to and fro. The eggs are from five to seven in number, of a bluish green, marked with a few small specks of reddish brown.

The whinchat is a pleasing bird, both from its beautiful colours and its vivacious manners. Its food consists of worms, slugs, and insects, caught in the air; and it also eats several of the wild berries, which hang on the boughs in autumn, as a provision for the feathered race.

CHAPTER VI.

REDBREAST—REDSTART—BLUE-THROATED WARBLER.

WHO that has wandered into the woods when autumn has reddened or gilded the leaves, and left few flowers to brighten the wayside, but has missed the loud chorus of song which greeted him from those boughs in summer? Far away over the fields may be seen the flocks of fieldfares and redwings, and where the rivulet wanders among the grass, the woodcock with its pale brown plumage has come to seek its retreat. The gulls are screaming loud over the sea, but the swallows have taken their departure, and the linnets and the buntings have come in flocks to be nearer our dwellings. September has brought a richness of tint to the woodlands, to compensate in some measure for the fulness of song, which shall no more delight us, till months have passed away, and the *little birds* of spring shall again be busy and

joyous; and those which are now, perchance, singing in warmer climates, shall come back to their old and long-remembered haunts.

And yet the wanderer now may be greeted by an occasional strain of music. Even the notes of the yellowhammer are welcome as the bird flits before us from bush to bush, as if wishing for our companionship; and the goldfinch has begun again to welcome a bright day with a tune; while the thrush or the blackbird now and then accompanies them, or the hedge-sparrow trills a lay from the bough, or the skylark or the woodlark pours its flute-like notes into the air. The songs are all sweet—perhaps the sweeter because we hear them so rarely, but the notes are not so gay as in the brighter days of summer. They have a plaintiveness, which agrees well with the whispers of the autumnal winds among the trees, and with the falling leaves, which those winds scatter before them to die.

But these birds are rather the occasional singers, than the constant minstrels, of the autumnal or winter months. Not so the robin and the wren; for, as the old adage says, "When the robin sings, look out for winter." No weather, save the gloomy

rain, will keep it from carolling a lay, nor cold nor frost give a sadness to the song. The frost-bound earth may be crisp with diamonds, and the leaves all gone from the trees, and not a flower be left save the daisy and the chickweed, yet robin will even then sing to the dreary blast, and might in autumn well suggest such thoughts as the author of the "Christian Year" has so beautifully expressed:—

"Sweet messenger of calm decay,
Saluting sorrow as you may,
As one still bent to find or make the best;
In thee and in this quiet mead,
The lesson of sweet peace I read,
Rather, in all, to be resign'd than blest.

"'Tis a low chant, according well
With the soft solitary knell,
As homeward, from some grave beloved, we turn;
Or by some lowly death-bed dear,
Most welcome to the chasten'd ear
Of her whom heaven is teaching how to mourn."

We all look upon the Redbreast* (*Erythaca rubecula*) as the bird of the cold season; not,

* The Redbreast is five inches and three-quarters in length. Whole upper parts olive-brown; the wing-coverts tipped with buff; face, throat, and breast dull orange, margined with grey; *lower parts* impure white; beak black; feet purplish-brown.

however, because its singing is really peculiar to that period, for it is uttered during nearly the whole of the year. But we hardly hear those notes amid the louder lays of spring, neither is the robin then so immediately distinguished from other birds, as the red colour on the breast is not so bright in summer. Far better do we know the bird when want drives it nearer to our dwellings, and the strain is uttered from the garden tree, or the leafless hedge by our rural walk. No resident in the country during winter can fail to see and recognise the redbreast, and one often wonders where so many can have hidden themselves before. Take a walk into a garden, now, and away flies the robin, going before you all the way, stopping if you stop, or if you stoop to rear some drooping plants, hopping there too, to see if, as you raise the withered foliage, some slug or insect is turned up also which may serve for a meal. Open your window, and place some crumbs on the sill, and though you may not at first espy one single redbreast, yet in a few minutes numbers of these bright-eyed creatures will assemble there, and one will be found bold enough to enter the room, where he,

"Hopping o'er the floor,
Eyes all the smiling family askance,
And pecks and starts, and wonders where he is."

Now and then the housewife of the farm-house or cottage is annoyed because the redbreasts will come into the bedrooms every evening for shelter, but generally the "minstrel of the poor" is a favoured bird. If undisturbed it will often keep to its winter quarters till spring comes back again, never showing the slightest inclination to depart, but looking down with a half-timid, half-hopeful inquiry, to see if it is welcome to some elevation in the room, on which it has placed itself. In forests when woodmen are employed, these birds become their constant companions, sharing their meals, and hopping around their fire for warmth; and the gardener often finds it difficult to avoid injuring them by his spade, which they approach so nearly, when he is digging in the earth. Treat the robin kindly, and you may be sure of a song from the garden hedge; and whistle to it, or sing it a few notes, and it will listen and answer. Not a woodland bird has a sweeter or softer tune, though many sing louder and more varied strains. Its best melody is in spring and summer, when it is far

more joyous too, in its expression, than in the more plaintive pipings of autumn, or the more abrupt strains of the inclement season. In summer time that song is heard at earliest dawn, but it is never sung after evening twilight, although the redbreast may be seen fluttering among those of our birds which are latest in seeking repose. A welcome song it is after some days of summer rain and showers, for if uttered in the evening its sprightly notes give full promise that to-morrow will be finer than to-day, as robin with his quick sensibilities knows that the sunshine is coming. From our hearing the robin comparatively little when its song is best, its vocal powers are not often duly estimated. A good observer, writing in the Magazine of Natural History, thus remarks: —"I have frequently heard this bird sing in a manner to do honour to its connexion with the nightingale, when it has been disputed whether or not it could be the robin. I would at any time silence the finished song of the chaffinch, in three distinct parts, to listen to the note of my warm-hearted friend, Robin. I doubt even if there be any bird I would prefer but the nightingale itself: I hesitate as to the blackcap." When the bird is suddenly alarmed it utters a kind of chirp, or

call-note, and if this be imitated, all the redbreasts in the neighbourhood will quickly be gathered to the spot. The old notion, once generally believed in England, that a chorus of robins preceded the death of some inmate of a dwelling near, is almost forgotten now: but a chorus is rarely heard, for the robin sings and dwells alone.

White, of Selborne, remarked that the songsters of the autumn seem to be the young male redbreasts of that year; and this statement is confirmed by many observers. Our poor little birds are seldom caged in this country, nor is there much inducement to imprison them thus, for though they will now and then utter a merry carol when in confinement, yet they are usually dull and dispirited, and seem anxious to escape. In Germany they are, however, kept in aviaries and large rooms, with better success, and soon become tame. Several of our good singing birds can be taught to imitate the human voice, and Mr. Syme tells us of a redbreast, possessed by a lady of his acquaintance, which very distinctly pronounced the words, "How do you do?"

It is, perhaps, as much by its touching song, as by its confidence in man, that the robin is a favourite in most countries. Everywhere some

pet name is bestowed on the household bird. Thus our Robin or Bob, is in some parts of Sweden called Tommy Liden; in Norway, Peter Ronsmed; in Germany, Thomas Gierdet. Wordsworth alludes to these familiar names:—

"Art thou the bird whom man loves best,
The pious bird with the scarlet breast,
Our little English Robin;
The bird that comes about our doors
When autumn winds are sobbing?
Art thou the Peter of Norway boors?
Their Thomas in Finland
And Russia far inland?
The bird that by some name or other
All men who know thee call brother."

Most Englishmen have wept, during childhood, over the fiction, which was then taken as a truth, and which told of the redbreast and the babes of the wood. It was but a poet's tale, though related with simple beauty; and while it has helped to keep up the privileged character of the bird, yet doubtless it had its origin in the favour in which Robin had been held from still earlier times:—

"Their pretty lips with blackberries
Were all besmear'd and dyed;
And when they saw the darksome night,
They sate them down and cried.

"No burial this pretty pair
Of any man receives;
Till robin redbreast, painfully,
Did cover them with leaves."

Nor was the idea of the redbreast's care in this matter peculiar to this poem. We find it alluded to in several old writers. Thus, John Webster, who wrote in 1630—1638, says:—

"Call for the robin redbreast, and the wren,
Since o'er shady groves they hover,
And with leaves and flowers do cover
The friendless bodies of unburied men.

Michael Drayton too alludes to it:—

"Covering with moss the dead's unclosèd eye,
The little redbreast teacheth charitie."

Then we have Herrick, in his Hesperides, telling how Amarillis, soothed by the low murmurings of a spring, fell asleep:—

"And thus sleeping, thither flew
A robin redbreast; who, at view,
Not seeing her at all to stir,
Brought leaves and moss to cover her."

Nor has the greatest of all England's poets omitted the allusion to a tradition so poetic. In "Cymbeline," we have Shakespere saying,—

"The ruddock would,
With charitable bill, (O bill, sore shaming
Those rich-left heirs, that let their fathers lie
Without a monument,) bring thee all this;
Yea, and furr'd moss besides, when flowers are none,
To winter-ground thy corse."

There was evidently, in the olden time, a pretty generally diffused notion, that the robin strewed the graves of the friendless, who had none to cover them, or to plant a flower on the tomb. It is not easy in later days to detect the origin of legends, but in this case there is one practice of the bird, which, combined with his love of man, might suggest the notion to some imaginative mind. If the spot on which the robin builds its nest is not well hidden by the surrounding foliage, the birds often cleverly conceal it, by amassing a number of withered leaves around the spot. The mother-bird will also sometimes, when leaving her nest, cover over the eggs in the same way. Shakespere calls our bird the ruddock; and it is still in some counties called so. It is doubtless a corruption of redcock.

But much as the robin wins our regard by its confiding companionship, yet it must be confessed that it has a trait of character not quite so pleasing.

It is well known to be among the most pugnacious of birds, seeming to hail with delight any opportunity of making a quarrel, and driving away, with most determined resistance, any intruder into the domain which it considers its own; so that two nests are rarely found near together, thus confirming the old Latin proverb, "Two robins cannot dwell in one bush." Nor does the redbreast fight only with birds of its own species. The poor house-sparrow, itself rather a quarrelsome bird, if one may judge from its perpetual clamours with its companions, is pecked at when no harm is done, by our wilful robin; and even the little merry, gentle, peace-loving hedge-sparrow or dunnock, is buffeted with angry blows by this quarrelsome bird. It is just the same when kept in confinement. Either it must have a room all to itself, or it will fight perpetually with another bird, till one of the two is fairly conquered. Bechstein says, that if two redbreasts share a large room, they will divide it; and each taking possession of a half, will remain at peace, unless one should pass its limits, in which case war begins, and is kept up to the last extremity. This, however, is only in cases where the strength

is pretty equal; for if one be much weaker than the other, the stronger robin will show its companion no mercy. If a petted redbreast should come to a spot and find another there, the poor bird will have no rest, but will be annoyed by every means which robin's petty rage can devise, even if it escape being killed. Mr. Thompson, in his Notes of a Naturalist, records several instances of the redbreast's pugnacity. It will, he says, in some cases completely blind it to its own safety, as he witnessed in a combat between two birds at Margate. This was commenced at the most frequented part of the town, and the redbreasts struggled together at the feet of the passengers, rose in the air while continuing the conflict, and finally fell into the harbour. Here they were picked up, still most pertinaciously clinging to each other. This writer, as well as other observers, has remarked that the tendency to fighting is greater during autumn than at any other season. He narrates a singular instance, which occurred at the close of September, 1835. "I heard," he says, "a robin warbling in a tree, in a small garden adjoining my house, and wishing to excite its attention, I placed in the window-sill a beautifully

stuffed specimen of the bird, which was soon perceived. The song became louder and louder, and in longer strains, as if sounding a challenge. Presently he made a flight of inspection as far as the window, which, after an interval, was repeated, but in the shape of an attack. So violent was it, that he threw the stuffed bird to the ground from the height of two stories, pursuing it as it fell, and attacking it violently when down. I then perched it on an empty box standing in the yard, the live bird remaining within a yard of me while I was doing so, and the moment I withdrew a few paces, he renewed the charge with such obstinacy that I could easily have caught him; and on my recovering the stuffed bird, he resumed his place on the box, strutting about with an expanded tail and an erect attitude, as if claiming and pronouncing a victory. Shortly after, on noticing the bird to be still hovering about the neighbourhood, I replaced my specimen on the window-sill, securing the stand by a brad-awl; and hardly had I done so, before the robin resumed the war by settling on the head of his unconscious foe, digging and pecking at it with the greatest rage and violence. I then interfered, and removed the

object of strife, but the robin kept watch in the neighbourhood during the rest of the day, and was singing his triumphs even in the shades of the evening."

Country people say, that if a robin shows particular attachment to any person, it is a forerunner of his decease. A very little acquaintance with these birds will, however, show the fallacy of this opinion, for they are much pleased to be noticed, and quarrelsome as they are with other birds, are easily won into friendship with man. The writer of these pages had a robin which came daily and pecked the crumbs from the table; it would answer by a chirp, if spoken to caressingly, and throughout the winter slept in her bedroom, roosting on a nail in a corner near the ceiling. At night, while the candle was burning, it would sit perfectly still with its bright eyes peering at all that was going forward; and in the morning would hop and chirp about the room, most merrily, coming quite near for its breakfast. After this, it generally flew out at the open window, and at about four o'clock would hop about on the sill waiting for its re-opening, when it would dart in, and take its accustomed seat,

chirping all the while its note of friendly recognition, and looking up as if waiting for a smile or word in return.

Redbreasts are very useful little birds in shrubberies, orchards, and gardens, and in many places are much encouraged by fruit growers, on account of the number of insects which they devour; they dart down upon these, as they lie among the leaves or herbage, seize them when the plough or the spade turns them up from the earth, and may be seen shaking the earthworm in their bill, and breaking it up into little pieces before eating it. It must be owned that they will, now and then, regale themselves with some ripe currants, or carry some off to their nestlings; and they will bear away, too, the red berries from the daphne in the garden, which are poisonous to all animals save birds; nor are they afraid of the almost equally noxious fruits, which hang, in autumn, from the boughs of the woody nightshade. In winter, they are chiefly dependent on such grains and crumbs as they can find about houses; but who would deny to the little birds which will sing to us so sweetly, and which have during the summer so effectually cleared our gardens of

insects, the meal which their small necessities require?

The robin is a very early nest builder. A perfectly finished nest has been found as early as January 14th, and may often be seen in February, when as yet the other birds have not thought of preparing a house; and by April the nests of the redbreast are very common. Two or three broods are reared in a season; and the nest is made of dried leaves, moss and grasses, and lined with hair. The eggs are five in number, and are white, spotted with pale reddish brown.

Various places are chosen by this bird for its nest, and Bishop Mant well describes such as are commonly selected:—

> "Most of all to haunts of men
> Familiar, though to savage glen
> And woodland wild he oft may roam
> Secluded, oft his wintry home;
> No less the redbreast makes his bower
> For nestlings in the vernal hour;
> In thatch or root of aged tree,
> Moss-grown, or arching cavity
> Of bank or garden's refuse heap;
> Or where the broad-leaved tendrils creep
> Of ivy, and an arbour spread
> O'er *trellised* porch or cottage shed."

It is in just such places as these that one would look for a robin's nest; but our bird by no means confines itself to such, for it sometimes makes a selection of some most strange and out of the way spot. Thus, a pair of robins have been known to rear their young in the festoon of an unused bed; others, in a hothouse among some strawberry plants, and under the immediate eye of the gardener. Another pair strewed the withered leaves, by way of beginning, on the shelves of a gentleman's library, intending to rear their young ones in a learned neighbourhood. On one occasion, a pair of redbreasts chose for their abode a potato warehouse, close to a blacksmith's shop, which was frequently visited by the owners, besides that it resounded with the perpetual din of forge and anvil from the dwelling near it. Nothing daunted, however, the robins entered through an open window-pane, and built their first nest in a toy-cart, which was hanging over the fireplace. Many of the neighbours, attracted by the singularity of the circumstance, visited the nest; but the birds reared their first brood in peace and hope. When the younglings flew away, the redbreasts *began* preparing for another family, and they

made their second nest on a shelf opposite the former one, and close by a mouse-trap; and here the nestlings throve, till in due time they too went away to wood or garden. Choosing another shelf, in a different corner of the room, the old birds made a third nest; and there in this moss-covered dwelling, placed on a bundle of papers, the four nestlings might be seen, on Midsummer-day, in their half-fledged state, fed by the mother bird, and watched on the outside by her mate, while several persons were looking on. It was well known that all the nests were built by the same robins, as the hen-bird was rendered very conspicuous by the loss of her tail feathers.

The Rev. W. T. Bree relates a singular place chosen for nidification. "A few years ago," says this naturalist, "a pair of robins took up their abode in the parish church of Hampton in Arden, Warwickshire, and for two years in succession affixed their nest to the church Bible, as it lay on the reading-desk. The worthy vicar would on no account have the bird disturbed; and accordingly introduced into the church, another Bible, from which to read the lessons. A question has been facetiously asked, whether these birds were not

guilty of sacrilege; not so much on account of the daring liberty they had taken with the sacred volume, as for having plundered the rope-ends out of the belfry, wherewith to construct their habitation. Be this as it may, the old women of the village took it into their heads that the circumstance of the robin's building on the Bible was highly ominous, and foreboded no good to the vicar. It so happened that he died in the month of June of the second year of the bird's building in the church; an event which no doubt confirmed the old women in their superstition,

> "Ni frustra augurium vani docuere parentes."—*Virgil.*
>
> "Unless
> My parents taught me augury in vain;"—
>
> *Trapp's Translation.*

and will be remembered and handed down to posterity, for the benefit of any future vicar, should the robins again make a similar selection."

The redbreast loses, in summer, nearly all the hue to which it owes its name. The first appearance of the red colour is about the end of August, but the bird is not fully red-breasted till the close of September. Young redbreasts are very different in plumage from the adult birds, as they are

marked all over with rust-coloured spots on a light ground. The robin is very generally diffused over England, Ireland, and Wales, and is also an inhabitant of the northern counties of Scotland. Though a resident with us through the year, it is migratory in some of the colder countries of the continent. There are ornithologists also who think that the female and young birds leave us in the winter, as none but male robins haunt our houses and gardens at that season.

In some countries, where the legends so favourable to the robin are unknown, these birds are caught by dozens for the table. This is the case in Greece, and Mr. Waterton saw them exposed for sale in the markets of Italy.

The pretty merry Redstart* (*Phœnicura ruticilla*), though by no means so common a bird as the redbreast, yet also haunts the dwellings of man, and comes to our orchards and gardens, or frequents

* The Redstart is five inches and a quarter in length. Upper parts lead-colour; wing-quills brown with pale edges; tail-feathers with their coverts rust-brown; forehead white; face, sides of the neck, and throat black; under parts pale chestnut. The female has the colours less decided; and wants the white on the forehead, and the black of the face and throat. Beak black; feet brown.

the copses or borders of the larger wood. This brisk little bird flits along with great quickness, snapping, on its way through the air, at the insect hovering there, and seldom failing in securing its victim. Then, too, the elegant and bright creature hops along the ground with the greatest gaiety, vibrating its reddish tail continually; or sometimes it sits aloft on some tree, singing its soft sweet song, ever accompanying it with this vibratory movement, whether it utters it from the bough, or in its flittings through the air from one low tree to another. It seems very fond of ivied ruins, and as its song sounds in these romantic places, it reminds us of Wilson's words:—

> "I could na' see the bonnie bird,
> She cower'd sae close upon her nest;
> But that saft ither sang I heard,
> That lull'd her and her brood to rest.
>
> "Sweet through the silent dawning rung
> The pleasure of that lovely sang;
> And the auld tower again look'd young,
> That psalm sae sweetly stole alang."

This song, which is sung from morning till night, has been heard as early as three o'clock in the morning, when it had not ceased on the pre-*ceding* evening before ten. Like most sweet

singers, the bird has a delicate ear, and imitates, even in a wild state, the notes of other birds, "embellishing," as Bechstein says, "its natural song (composed of several rather pretty strophes) by adding the notes of other birds with which it associates." One which had built beneath the eaves of this writer's house, imitated pretty closely the song of a chaffinch which was hung in a cage beneath; while a neighbour of his had a redstart in his garden, which repeated the notes of a blackcap that had a nest near it. In confinement it is said by Sweet to be able to learn to sing any tune that is whistled or sung to it. One which he possessed, learned the "Copenhagen Waltz," that it had frequently heard sung, only it would sometimes stop in the middle, and say "chipput," a name by which it was generally called, and which it would repeat whenever its master entered the room, either by day or night. Other birds of this species have been known to imitate very closely the notes of the sparrow, and the songs of the garden warbler and the lesser whitethroat, the robin and the blackcap. Its own song, though soft and sweet, has little variation and no great force.

The name, from the Saxon, *steort*, a tail, is significant of the peculiar horizontal motion of this part of the bird, which motion does not resemble that of the wagtail, but, as a naturalist has observed, is more like that of a dog. The young redstart is so like a newly-fledged redbreast, that it would often be mistaken for it, were not this vibration of the tail so marked as at once to distinguish it. The bird is in many country-places called Fire-tail, from the bright red-colour of its tail feathers, and in some districts it is termed Bran-tail. The redstart builds its nest very loosely: it is made chiefly of moss and stalks of grasses, well lined with feathers, intermixed sometimes with a little down, or hair. The eggs are five or six in number, and of a fine greenish blue. The places usually chosen for the nest are holes in garden walls, ledges in out-houses, and retreats among the dark green ivy. But the redstart is one of those birds which occasionally builds in some unusual spot. Thus, the Rev. W. T. Bree mentions a pair which once built under an inverted flower-pot, which had been accidentally left on a gravel path. The birds, of course, entered by the small drain-hole at the top, and much wonder was excited as to how

the young birds were to emerge from this dark dwelling-place. But they were, as the narrator remarks, "eventually indebted to female curiosity for their emancipation. A lady lifted up the pot to see whether the birds were there; when the whole brood, taking advantage of so favourable an opportunity, made their escape, darting forth in all directions, like rays from a centre." A redstart has been known to return regularly, for sixteen summers, to the garden where it first built.

The redstart is most attached to its young. If any harm seems likely to befal them, both the parent birds evince the greatest distress, and perching on some near spot keep up an unceasing clamour till the danger is over. While the hen bird is hatching, her companion watches over her most carefully, and at the slightest alarm keeps up a repetition of some low, plaintive, garrulous notes of warning. The helplessness of the young birds seems an object of constant solicitude, nor is it alone the wants of their own young which can thus call forth their love and care. An instance is recorded in which a similar feeling was evinced for the young brood of other birds. A

pair of redstarts built in the garden of the gentleman who relates the fact, and became very interesting to him by the affection which the male bird showed to his mate while sitting. This bird would sit on a tree near the nest, watching it with the greatest anxiety. Some days after it had been thus observed, the narrator, to his grief, saw a boy throw a stone at the bird, and kill it. "On my going to the place the next day," he says, "I was excessively surprised to see a male redstart sitting on the very same tree from which, the day before, the other had been knocked down. On my going near the nest, it flew away, with evident tokens of alarm; and on my putting my hand to the nest, the hen bird flew off. All I need say in addition is, that the eggs were hatched; and the foster-father, for such he certainly was, assisted, as the cock birds usually do, the hen in bringing up the young brood."

The food of the redstart consists of slugs, worms, various insects and their larvæ, and of several kinds of berries. It has been accused of watching the beehives, and seizing on the industrious little creatures when they emerged to roam the garden, but this charge seems to be quite without foundation.

THE BLACK-CAP.

The redstart is a summer resident with us from the south. It is in no part of Britain very abundant, and in some districts is a rare bird. In Holland, France, Spain and Italy, it is very plentiful: it also visits Germany, and migrates to Russia, Norway and Sweden. It arrives in our island in April, and departs by the end of September. The French call this bird *Rossignol de mur*, though, as Belon says, in his *Portraits d'Oyseaux*, "In comparison of the nightingale it sings nothing of any worth."

The Black Redstart (*Phœnicura tithys*) claims but a slight notice, since it is but an occasional visitor to our island. Its breast, instead of being red, like that of its allied species, is black as ebony. It delights in rocky, stony places, and makes its nests in clefts of rocks, in the wild, or builds near houses, in holes of walls, its little dwelling of grass, lined with hair. Bechstein says, that its voice contains a few high, clear notes, which may be heard from an early hour in the morning, till night. It is common in most of the temperate countries of Europe and Asia.

The Blue-throated Warbler, or Blue-throated Robin (*Phœnicura Suecica*), is another species, of

almost seem so to the lover of nature, and if they can boast of little harmony, at least are not discordant.

Something superior to the notes of these birds, are those of some of our native species of titmouse; and though we cannot agree with that old lover of birds, Belon, who says, in his *Portraits d'Oyseaux*, of the largest species, that they are "little birds which sing like angels," yet, we must confess to liking well the song of the great titmouse; while all will admit, that to the active, restless family of tits, we owe somewhat of the cheerfulness of the woods in spring. Most merry, busy, courageous little birds are these, and the song of the Greater Titmouse,* or Ox-eye (*Parus major*), is assuredly not without some music in it, though little varied, and it has a cry composed of notes so harsh and grating, that they have been compared to the sharpening of a saw, and obtained

* The Great Tit is nearly six inches in length. The head black; the back and shoulders greenish-ash; the rump and small wing-coverts bluish-grey; the rest of the wing dark bluish grey edged with white; tail bluish-black; a spot on the nape, and a large one on each side of the neck white; under parts dull yellow, with a stripe of black along the middle of the belly, which widens on the throat and joins the black of the head; beak black; feet grey.

GREATER TITMOUSE.

for it in France the name of *Le Serrurier*. It is one of our earliest builders in spring, placing its nest in some hole where wind and rain cannot reach it, yet making it nicely of moss, and lining it with hair and feathers. The nest contains from six to nine eggs, with a white ground, speckled and spotted with red. The usual food of the bird consists of insects, and one may be amused by watching the address with which the titmice generally will clear the trees of this tribe. They may be seen peering into the crevices of the boughs, going on from one to another, and suspending themselves in all manner of attitudes, till suddenly they espy some traces of insects. They will then seize with the greatest vigour the buds where these lie concealed, and tear them quickly to pieces. Yet let not the owner of the tree blame the birds. Those buds would never have come forth into healthy shoots, for a worm lying at the core had destroyed their vitality, and was still there ready for further mischief. The titmice, it is true, will eat the ripe pear, and make a meal of the ruddy apple, which so few small birds relish; but the immense number of caterpillars, small worms, and eggs of

insects which they consume, place them rather on the list of benefactors to the garden, than on that of depredators. One charge against the greater titmouse appears to be correct, which is, that it destroys bees; on which account it is called *Croque abeille* in some country places in France. It is said to watch the bees, and consume large numbers. It eats also grain and berries, and some oleaginous seeds, which it will hold down with its feet upon the branch, and by striking with the hard bill, will pierce the shell, and extract the kernel. The greater titmouse is the largest European species, and is courageous and even ferocious in its habits. None of our small birds will attack the owl with so much spirit as this tit, which will dart at him with the greatest rage, with ruffled plumes, and noisy shrieks, the cries resounding through the air, and calling many other birds of its own species to its assistance.

It shares, too, with the shrikes and crows the appetite for flesh, and will eat dead birds, and, when in confinement, kill living ones.

This active restless bird is very common in thick woods in the neighbourhood of gardens. In winter it approaches our dwellings, to look for the

MARSH TITMOUSE.

few flies or other insects yet to be found, or to gather the grain scattered among the refuse of the farm-yard.

The titmice are much to be admired for the rich tints of their plumage. The greater tit has the most beautiful black feathers on the head and throat, which are brilliantly radiated with blue; and the no less common Blue Tit* (*Parus cœruleus*), has the crown of the head of the most vivid blue, bounded on each side by a band of white. This is the blue titmouse, and the Billy Biter of the school-boy, who, on his bird-nesting expeditions, has perchance known what it was to be pecked at and hissed at by this courageous little bird. But the monotonous tones of the blue tit, heard often as early as February, do not entitle it to a place among our singing birds, nor will the rapidly uttered notes of the Marsh Tit (*Parus palustris*),

* The Blue Tit is four inches and a half in length. Crown of the head light blue; back and rump green; wings and tail light blue; the greater wing-coverts and tertials tipped with white; face and sides of the neck white, divided by a stripe of rich deep blue passing from the beak through each eye to the nape; another band of deep blue bounds the white below, coming round like a collar to the throat, and thence extending upwards to the chin, and downwards over the breast; under parts pale yellow; beak and feet nearly black.

heard among the bushes and osiers which fringe the waters, merry as they may be, arrest our footsteps by their music. The blue tit is useful in ridding us of insects in spring and summer, and is still more so in clearing them when they lie hidden in the buds of winter or early spring. So cleverly does it pick the bones of small birds, on which it feeds, that Klein proposes to employ it in the preparation of skeletons.

Then, too, we have that busy little bird, the Coletit, or Colemouse (*Parus ater*), which everybody who has lived in the country knows as a great frequenter of our gardens and shrubberies, coming there to seize the insects, or to gather the seeds of the pines and larches, which it stores away in some hole, for its future necessities. But its song if song it may be called, is little more than a chirp, and cannot rival at all the soft, clear, ringing notes which may be heard among the reeds of the marshes, where the rare Bearded Titmouse (*Calamophilus biarmicus*) sings them out in soft and silver tones. But the song of the Long-tailed Tit* (*Parus*

* The Long-tailed Tit is five inches and a half in length. Head and face greyish white; a patch of black passes over each *eye; back* and rump greyish-red, with a broad triangular patch

COLE TITMOUSE.

ALCEDINIDÆ. KINGFISHERS.

LONG-TAILED TIT MOUSE.

birds look almost like little lumps of down, as they wind their way among the boughs in pursuit of insects. They have several call-notes, and though one of these is very soft and low, it hardly deserves to be called a song.

The nest is usually placed so firmly in a bush, in the very centre of the boughs, that these must be cut away by any one who would preserve its beauty. The eggs are ten or twelve in number, small and white, sometimes speckled with a few red dots. The long-tailed tit is common in almost all our woods and shrubberies, and its food consists almost entirely of insects.

Resembling the titmice in their carnivorous propensities, the Shrikes have a far higher reputation as singing birds. The Great Grey Shrike* (*Lanius excubitor*), the cruel butcher-bird, has a sweet warbling song, though its rich melody is sometimes lessened by the intermingling of some harsh tones. It is said to have a power of imitating the notes of other birds, and though this is denied by some

* The Grey Shrike is ten inches in length. Whole upper parts pearl grey; wings and tail black, tipped with white; a patch of white at the base of the primaries; a band of black passes from the beak to the ear-coverts, enclosing the eye; under parts pure *white; beak* and feet black.

LARGE GREY SHRIKE.

ornithologists, yet there seems good authority for believing that it exists. Bechstein says of our shrike, that it imitates the notes, though not the songs, of other birds; and the statement of a writer in the Naturalist tends to confirm this opinion. This writer tells us that he was first led to discover this shrike, by hearing notes very similar to those of a stonechat, yet not quite familiar to his ear. These he ascertained were uttered by the butcher-bird, and as he listened he found them soon exchanged for softer and more melodious tones; not, however, prolonged into a continuous song or strain. Whether the opinion, held from earliest times, be true or false, that the shrike lures the singing bird into its clutches by imitating its tune, we well know that the small birds, as well as various animals, have good reason to dread it, both for its power and skill in making them its prey; and they seem terrified by its presence near their nests. It feeds on mice, shrews, frogs, lizards, and small birds; adding to its meal some of our larger insects, as grasshoppers and beetles. Nor will a small amount of food suffice to satisfy its appetite. Its own voracity, and that of its hungry little ones, make great demands on

the helpless creatures which are its victims. The shrike has a singular habit of fixing its slaughtered animals on a thorn, or on the forked branch of a tree, and so hanging them up, as a butcher might do the animals destined for sale; hence its familiar name of butcher-bird. A naturalist who kept this species in confinement, observed that when a bird was given to it, it always broke the skull, and usually ate the head first. Sometimes it held the bird in its claws, and pulled it to pieces as a hawk would do; though it seemed to prefer forcing a portion of it through the wires, and then pulling at it, always hanging up on the sides of its cage any part which remained after its meal. It would often eat three small birds in a day.

Our shrike has a number of familiar names, and many of those, both of our own and other lands, refer to its habits. Thus it is called the Mountain Magpie, the Murdering Pie, and the Shreek, in various parts of this island. Willoughby says, that in the north of England it is termed Weirangle; and the Germans also call it *Werkangel*, or *Wark-angel*. This was thought by Gesner to be the corruption of the word *Wurchangel*, which, rendered literally, signifies a suffocating angel. The Ger-

mans also call it by a word which we may render Ninekiller, because, say they, it kills nine birds every day. Another old English name is Mattagesse; and an old French writer calls it *Falconello.* From an old quatrain in *Portraits d'Oyseaux,* it seems to have been considered a useful bird in France, on account of its destructive warfare against mice, rats, and other animals. The name of the genus *Lanius* was given by Gesner, from *lanio,* to cut or tear in pieces.

The shrike was formerly much used by falconers, and an extract from the Book of Falconrie, or Hawkinge, published in 1611, and also from Sir John Sebright, will show why it received the specific name of *excubitor,* or sentinel, which Linnæus applied to it—the warder butcher-bird, as another writer on hawking calls it. "Her feeding," says Turbervile of this skrike, "is upon rattes, squirrells, and lisards; and sometime upon certaine birds, she doth use to prey, whom she doth entrappe and deceive by flight, for this is her devise. She will stand at pearch upon some tree or poste, and there make an exceeding lamentable cry and exclamation, such as birdes are wonte to doe being wronged, or in hazarde of mischief, and

all to make other fowles believe and thinke she is very much distressed, and stands needfulle of ayde; whereupon, the credulous sellie birdes do flock together, presently at her call and voice, at what time if any happen to approach neare her, she, out of hand, ceazeth on them, and devoureth them, (ungrateful subtile fowle!) in requital of their simplicity and pains. These hawkes are of no account with us, but poor simple fellowes and peasants sometimes doe make them to the fiste, and being reclaimed after their unskilful manners, doe have them hooded, as falconers doe their other kinds of hawkes, whom they make to greater purposes."

Sir John Sebright says that the butcher-bird is tied on the ground, near the tent of the falconer, while the latter employs himself in some sedentary occupation, relying on his vigilance to apprise him of the approach of a hawk. This the bird never fails to do, by screaming loudly, when the hawk is seen at a distance.

The great shrike is neither a resident, nor a regular visitor in our island, only coming occasionally to this country from some portion of the European continent, over a great part of which it *is pretty* generally diffused. The season at which

this bird visits Britain is usually between the autumn and the spring, and several counties are named as those in which it has been seen, and in some districts of which it is often common, as Surrey, Sussex, Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Devonshire, Worcestershire, Cheshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Yorkshire, Cumberland, Northumberland and Durham. It is supposed that the birds of this species which reach us, were in the course of migration to other lands, and being driven by adverse winds on our coast, are content to resort awhile to our fir plantations, or groves, or thickets. It is a common bird in France, remaining in the woods of that country all the summer, and residing on the open plains during the winter season. This large bold bird is about ten inches in length. It builds its nest in a tree at a great height from the ground, making it of grasses, moss and wool, lined with hair. The eggs are of a greyish white colour, spotted with brown and ash colour. The croaking, clamorous anxiety of this shrike during incubation, often betrays the place of its nest.

A writer in the Magazine of Natural History remarks, that a peculiar odour proceeds from the great shrike, after death, not unlike that which

arises from the explosion of gunpowder. He observes that he has found the same peculiarity in the nuthatch.

Though the great shrike, from its comparative unfrequency in our woods, contributes little to their minstrelsy, yet a smaller species, the Flusher or Red-backed Shrike* (*Lanius collurio*), is a regular visitant to our island, and a common bird in several parts of it; while as a singer it deserves great praise. It may often be seen and heard in the neighbourhood of London, and is frequent in Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, and some other counties haunting the borders of woods, or dwelling among the furze, broom, or brambles of our open downs. Like its congener, it is a true butcher-bird, though it is inferior in size and power to the great shrike. It has been known to kill birds as large as a finch, and is much feared

* The Red-backed Shrike is seven inches and a half in length. Head, neck, and rump grey; back chestnut-red; wing-feathers black, edged with red; tail-feathers white at the base, black towards the extremities, but tipped with white; a band of black along each cheek; under parts pale red; beak and feet black. The female has the upper parts dull reddish brown; the under parts greyish-white, barred with minute darker lines; the black *stripe* on the cheek is absent.

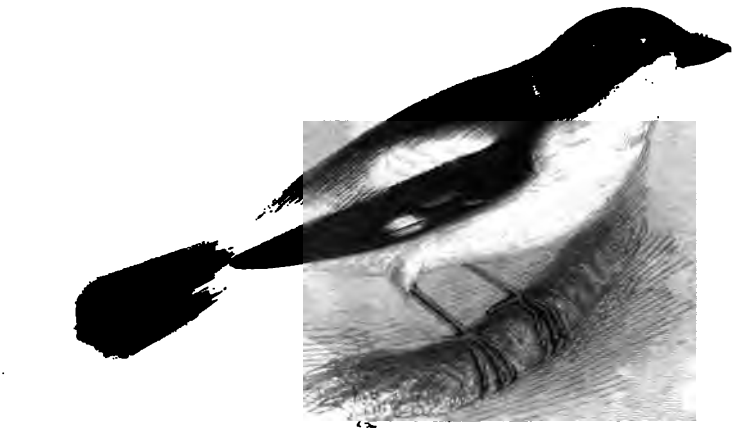
LANIUS CRISTATUS.

by small birds in general. The may-bug which floats in the air of the summer evening, dashing in our faces as we walk over the green meadows, is a favourite food of this species; and the merry song which the grasshopper sings among the herbage, proves only to be its own death warning, if this bird is nigh. It pounces down upon the insect, and flying off with it in its mouth, seeks some hawthorn, or prickly furze, or bramble bush, on which to hang it. During the time when its young are clamorous for food, several of these insects may be seen hanging thus impaled, and ready to be fetched away by the parent birds, as the nestlings may require them. Young birds are fiercely attacked, and naturalists have been attracted to a spot where the butcher-bird is to be seen, by the shrill cries of alarm uttered by some smaller birds; and on reaching the place have seen a youngling carried off in its beak to a neighbouring tree, where it was soon ingeniously transfixed, by the neck, to a thorn.

This shrike, like many of our smaller migratory birds, passes its winter in Africa; and comes to us in pairs, in April or May, leaving this land in September. It makes its nest in a high part of a

thick hedge or bush. Its form is like that of a large cup, and the materials employed are the coarse stalks of plants, moss and fibrous roots; while the lining consists of a few hairs, and some fine grasses. The eggs are four or five in number, pale bluish white, spotted with brown and ash colour.

The flusher sings its song in a continuous strain, from the top of a bush, or on the bough of a tree near its nest. It well imitates the notes of other birds, mixing with its own some which it borrows from the nightingale, goldfinch, or other singers. In captivity, Bechstein says, it learns quickly to whistle airs, but forgets them with the same facility in order to learn new ones. He says that it is a most lively bird, and that if taken out of a cage, it will soon clear the room of flies. It catches them while on the wing, and if a thorny branch is given it, it will impale all the insects, making at the same time the most droll and singular movements. One, which he had in confinement, refused the most tempting food, and on the fourth day its owner, thinking it too weak to injure the other birds, allowed it the liberty of flying about the room. An unfortunate hedge-sparrow became, however, its *immediate* victim, and after being put back again



into the cage, it ate all the food with which it was supplied, as if now its propensity had been satisfied.

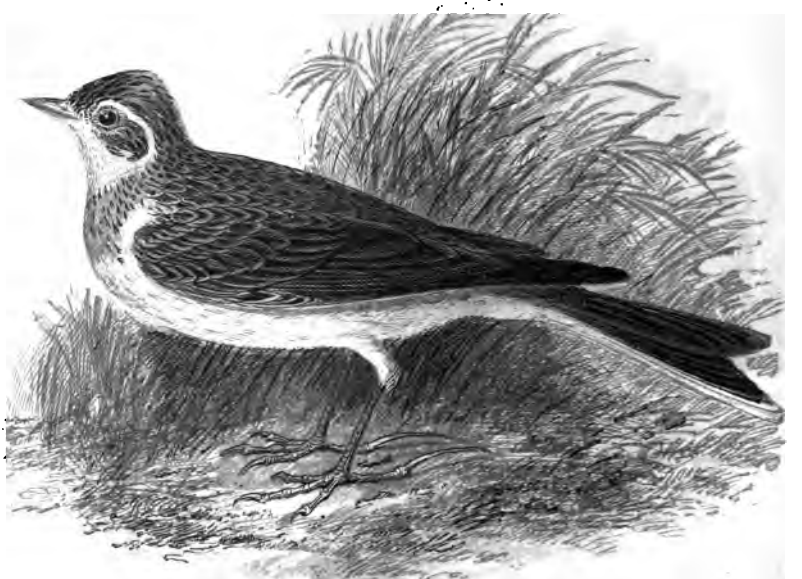
The power of imitating the notes of other birds is shared by another species of this family, the Wood-chat* (*Lanius rutilus*). Its own tones are not sweet, but it will learn to sing so like a nightingale or linnet, as to deserve a passing mention among our singing birds. It can, however, be scarcely called a British species, being but occasionally seen in our island, though common in France, Germany, and Italy. It is a larger bird than the flusher, and much resembles it in its habits.

* The Woodchat is seven inches and a half in length. Head and neck chestnut; forehead, cheeks, and ear-coverts black; back black; rump grey; wings and tail black, marked with white; under parts white.

CHAPTER VIII.

LARKS—PIPITS—BUNTINGS—SPARROWS.

As we may see in the flowers and trees with which our green earth is adorned, that woodland, rock, and river have plants of their own, so, too, all the varied spots of our landscape have birds which haunt them especially. The streamlet runs along the grass, and the wagtails and the dipper are there to sing to its tune. The marsh is lonely, but it has its flowers and its birds too; and the chorus sung among the stiff sedges, or the bowing reeds, is so sweet that we gladly seek some little mound of grass on which we may sit and listen. On the stone or furze-clad heath, a full flow of song salutes the morning sunshine; and a loud hymn of thanksgiving is heard, by day or night, among the woodlands, which should awaken our souls to praise. The white cliff, which fringes our shore, echoes not alone to the sound of winds and waves, and screaming seagulls, but gives back the singing of the shore lark, which makes its



home near them. Some of the sweetest of our singing birds come to our gardens and shrubberies, or utter their strains about our paths and homes; while some, like the skylark, are musicians of the fields, and we have only to take our course where the green corn is gradually preparing for the food of man, and there we shall find tones which we should listen for in vain among the shadows of green boughs. He who made the earth and man upon it, gave us not only the materials which our skill might fashion into sources of physical comfort; but he scattered there, too, the sights which should delight the eye, and tones which should minister to the spirit through the outward ear.

Winter is here, and the frosts and snows of yesterday have left their diamonds on the leafless sprays and the green blades, and thrown large white patches over the field. In a few hours the sun shall bid them all glide away from the land, for the air is clear, and the sky is blue, and the Lark*

* The Skylark is seven inches and a quarter in length. Head crested; general plumage brown, dark in the centre, and pale at the edges; outer tail-feather white; the next streaked with white; throat and breast pale brown spotted with dark brown; under parts dull white; beak and feet brown; hind claw very long and nearly straight.

(*Alauda arvensis*) is singing at Heaven's gate so rejoicingly, that we feel that there can be few sounds of earth

"More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear."

We watch the bird as it ascends almost perpendicularly in its direction, but by sudden starts and a somewhat curve-like motion. Higher and higher it rises, and

"Singing ever soars, and soaring ever sings;"

soon it is a tiny speck in the blue sky, but its voice reaches us yet, in one clear loud carol; and now the bird is lost to our sight in the blue clouds, but the strain is heard still. Those who hear the lark singing thus high in the air, know that it gives a promise of some hours of fine weather, for, like many of our old proverbs, that which is in common use in country places, in some measure is founded on correct observation:

"When the lark is mounted high
He drives the clouds out from the sky."

These are but rough rhymes, yet it is true that the bird will not sing during rain, nor mount far in the air when the sky is at all overcast. But

the lark, though loving the sky well, has ties to earth; and now it descends slowly in a slanting line, till it is about twelve feet from the land; when darting onward like an arrow from a bow, and gradually lessening the power of the song, it reaches the earth in silence.

That hymn of joy is heard not only as early as February, but it is sung during nearly eight months of the year. It is one of the first which reaches the ear of the husbandman, when he goes forth to his daily labour. That matin hymn is silenced at noonday, but when the afternoon is come with its coolness, or evening with its lengthened shadows, the lark again chants forth its melody. In ancient Greece the afternoon song was the signal for the reaper to recommence the work which had been intermitted during the heat of noon. Wherever the lark is plentiful, it is sure to be heard at this time of the day, over the cornfield or other cultivated land. To rise with the lark, as well as to lie down with the lamb, has long been a rustic precept in our country; and by two o'clock in the summer morning, our lark has arisen to salute the dawn, though even then the redbreast may have sung its song before it.

Shakespere, like many another poets, loved the

song which gave "sweet tidings of the sun's uprise," and welcomed as we do the "herald of the morn." Shelley's beautiful comparisons of this bird are too well known to be quoted, and Wordsworth has a poem to the lark which contains some beautiful stanzas.

"Chanter by heaven attracted, whom no bars
To daylight known, deter from that pursuit,
'Tis well that some sage instinct, when the stars
Come forth at evening, keeps thee still and mute;
For not an eyelid could to sleep incline
Wert thou among them singing as they shine!"

A touching little incident is recorded by Lockhart as having occurred during the funeral of his wife, the daughter of Sir Walter Scott. Just as the remains of the departed were committed to the tomb, and as the clergyman was reading the solemn service, a lark sang sweetly and loudly in the sky above the mourners and the mourned. Lockhart's lines which relate this scene are very beautiful:—

"O thou light-loving and melodious bird,
At every sad and solemn fall
Of mine own voice, each interval
In the soul-elevating prayer, I heard
Thy quivering descant full and clear—
Discord not inharmonious to the ear!

"We laid her there, the Minstrel's darling child;
Seem'd it then meet that, borne away
From the close city's dubious day,
Her dirge should be thy native woodnote wild;
Nursed upon nature's lap, her sleep
Should be where birds may sing, and dewy flowerets weep?"

As the free lark rises in the air, we wonder alike at its strength of wing and power of vision. It is near to the sun, and among those clouds which give so dazzling a reflected light, that the human eye cannot rest for a moment upon them. And yet from that height it can descend to the spot where its nest lies, or pounce on the insect which it needs for its food. Buffon has said of the hawk, that it can see from on high a lark upon a clod of earth at twenty times the distance at which man or horse can perceive it. We know that the scattered crumbs around our dwellings are at once espied by the sparrow on the house-top, and the redbreasts on the bough; nor is the lark less gifted than either. Sight, indeed, is extremely perfect in birds. Whether that faculty of discerning equally well the near or distant object, is owing to some power which they possess of changing the convexity of the eye, we know

not; but we know that without this faculty the bird must either lose its chance of finding food, or, on the other hand, be utterly unfitted to direct its wing over wood, and sea, and mountain, as it now does. The swallow could not skim through the air without instant danger of being dashed against some hard object, could it not discern this from a distance, and be thus enabled to moderate its rapid flight. The carrier-pigeon could not traverse vast extent of countries, did it not discover, from on high, the land-marks which guided its course; and neither, without great power of vision, could our lark come straight to its home from its sojourn in the clouds. One marked peculiarity in the eye of birds enables us to understand how the lark can endure the dazzling light of the sun. Besides the two eyelids, common to most animals, birds have a membrane which serves as a third. This thin membrane, when not in use, is folded in the inner angle of the eye; but can be spread all over the orb at the will of the bird, which is thus enabled to gaze, as through a delicate gauze veil, into a shaded light. This little curtain does not move up or down like our eyelids, but is spread

vertically over it. Besides this, the lark, in common with all birds save the owls, can see a single object with one eye, while the situation of the eyes at the side of the head gives them the view of a much wider space than is enjoyed by those animals whose eyes are situated in front of the head.

The nest of the sky-lark is placed on the ground, and shielded by some clod of earth or clump of foliage. It is made of dried grasses, and the eggs, which are four or five in number, are of a greyish white, tinged with green. The nestlings when fledged, do not, like most young birds, keep together in a little party, but roam singly over the field; and one would wonder how the parent birds contrive to help them to their food, till they can fully provide for their own needs. Larks, though not pugnacious birds, are not social in their habits, and it is not often that several nests are placed in the same field, or that the birds associate at this season in companies, for they mostly run about in pairs. Later in the year, however, when winter is approaching, these birds collect in large parties, and being joined by arrivals from the northern regions, they leave the open grounds, and find more sheltered spots, going in incredible numbers

to turnip and wheat fields, and to fallow lands. They are at this season very fat, and many are shot, or taken by the fowler for food. The larks of Dunstable are considered of very superior flavour, and they are annually snared in that neighbourhood, and sent to the London market. In most countries of Europe, larks are prized as delicacies; and Montbelliard says that in France a hundred dozen or more are sometimes taken at once. These birds are very plentiful in Germany, and are there subject to an excise, which Keysler says produces six thousand dollars yearly to Leipsic. The duty at Leipsic is about two and a half sterling for every sixty birds; and it is sometimes known to produce twelve thousand crowns. The fields of that neighbourhood are sometimes literally covered with these birds, from Michaelmas till the end of November. On the continent this fowling for larks is considered a good country sport, and the French nobility formerly practised it; but in England it is left to the bird-catcher. In France, during very severe weather, the larks have been known to come in parties to villages, and even to take refuge in houses, and having been totally exhausted by want of food, have been easily killed

in numbers by poles. Owing to the improvident destruction of so many of these birds for the table, sky-larks are much less numerous in that country than they once were.

When winter is over, the large companies of larks are separated, and they go forth in pairs to select a place for the nest. This is usually built by the end of April, or beginning of May. The first brood is ready for flight by the end of June, and the second is fledged by August.

The lark will sing and become familiar in captivity, and will live thus caged for nine or ten years; though surely, when it looks up through its prison bars to that broad blue expanse into which its instinct directs it to soar, regrets and longings must come to the heart of the bird, which render its green cage with its bright white ceiling hateful to it, and the daisied turf at its feet little better than a mockery.

The sky-lark is well known to be much attached to its young. The male bird, during the time that his companion is sitting, is changed from a timid to a bold creature; and though, under ordinary circumstances, easily driven from any spot, will now fight with much determination the

and loud, rising higher and higher from its lowly home in the herbage, like the heart of the Christian, which, if constrained to dwell awhile on earth, can at times lift itself to heaven.

The French call the sky-lark, *Alouette de champs;* the Italians, *Lodola canterina,* and *Lodola di montagno;* and it is the *Feld Lerche* of the Germans. It is very general in all the countries of Europe.

A very sweet singer is the Wood-lark,* (*Alauda arborea*), but though its flute-like notes are as rich and sweet as those of the sky-lark, they are hardly so varied, and never so loud. It is even an earlier singer than that bird, and is associated in our minds with the cold wintry days. At a season when the eye wanders in vain in search of a green bough, save where it rests on a wild holly or a garden evergreen, and when the meadow-grass has but few daisies among it; at a time when winds sweep through the desolate woods, this bird is singing his long full song for hours together; and when joined by several of its com-

* The Wood-lark is six inches in length. The plumage resembles that of the sky-lark, but it may be distinguished by a *pale streak* above each eye.

panions, making the otherwise still landscape resound with melody. Who that goes into the corn land, bordered by woods, in January, does not welcome there the gentle song of the robin, and the richer strain of the wood-lark, mingled as they are with the bleak winds which rush among the boughs, and scatter the brown leaves over the pathway, in wild confusion? Who has not gone away to his fire-side, taking with him, from the woods, a pleasant cheerful thought, and a memory of gladness and joy, when he had little hoped for one sound of music, save that of the wind? How strong the bird seems as it wheels its way, in large circles, singing high in air, sometimes for an hour together, and never pausing to rest either its wing or voice! This wheeled mode of flight at once distinguishes it from the sky-lark, which rises in the air almost perpendicularly, and with a spiral movement. Our wood-lark, too, has the power of remaining longer on the wing, and though its song reaches us chiefly from a great elevation, so that we can scarcely discern its expanded wings and tail, yet it sometimes perches on the top of a high tree, or lower down, among the boughs, and gives us from them as sweet a strain.

In the spring we do not hear it so clearly, for amid the general chorus of birds, the delicate song is scarcely remarkable; but in the silence of the night, when night itself hardly brings coolness to the air, the sweet carol of the wood-lark on high may be listened to with delight; and many think it little inferior to that of the nightingale. Pity it is, that this sweet wild song should ever be exchanged for the tones uttered in captivity; yet the wood-lark is sometimes caged. When wild, it sings usually from March to July, though, as has been before said, it is occasionally to be heard, not only in the autumnal months, but even in winter. When kept in-doors, however, it sings regularly from February to August; and the female, as is the case with other larks, sings also, though hers is a shorter strain. "These birds," says Bechstein, "appear to be subject to caprice. I have seen some which would never sing in a room, or in the presence of an auditor. These perverse birds must be placed in a long cage, outside the window. I have remarked that these obstinate birds are the best singers. Their abrupt step, and various frolics, in which they raise the feathers of the head and neck, are very amusing."

Woodweete is an old name for the wood-lark; and the woodwele of our old English writers is also thought to signify this bird, though some refer it to the thrush. In the old ballad of Robin Hood, we have—

> "The woodwele sang, and would not cease,
> Sitting upon the spray,
> So loud, he waken'd Robin Hood,
> In the green-wood where he lay."

The night-song of the bird is plaintive in its tones, and a very melancholy little note, sounding out softly the syllable "lu, lu, lu, lu," is also uttered by the wood-lark; hence Cuvier calls the bird the *lulu*. As winter approaches, these larks associate in small flocks, of ten or twelve in number, and ramble over the fields for food, seeking there some scattered grain, or flower-seed, or the insects and worms which lie hid among the clods and herbage.

The wood-lark is less general than the sky-lark, though not uncommon in the southern and midland counties, and the cultivated fields bordered by woods or trees. In the northern countries of Europe it is migratory, going southwards in winter. It is much like the sky-lark, but smaller, and may be *distin*guished from it by its shorter

tail, and by a pale stripe passing over each eye. It builds early in April, and places its nest in some field under the covert of a tuft of furze or bramble, or a clump of herbage. The nest is composed of dried grasses, and lined with finer species; the eggs are of pale brown or grey, dashed with brown.

Both this bird and the sky-lark have a habit of rolling themselves in the dust, which appears to be a mode of cleansing their plumage from anything which adheres to it, and which has been compared to the well-known practice of the Arabs of the desert, who, when they are far from the water necessary for their stated ablutions, rub themselves with fine sand instead. The caged larks often rub their breasts against the dry sides of the turf which is placed in the cage.

The pipits, or tit-larks, are very similar to the larks, both in appearance and habits; and, like them, are delightful singers. The most common, and the smallest of the genus, is the Meadow Pipit* (*Anthus pratensis*), which, however, is not

* The Meadow Pipit is six inches in length. Upper parts brown, the feathers having dark centres and pale edges; outmost tail-feather white; under parts brownish-white; the breast thickly

peculiar to our grassy lands and marshes, but inhabits commons, mountains, rocky sea-shores, bleak uplands, and other wide wastes. In the lake counties, where this pipit frequents the heath-clad moors, it is commonly called the Ling-bird, from the ling which grows there. In the Orkney Isles it is known by the name of Grey Teeting; and in Scotland, where it is as frequent as in England, it has the name of Moss Cheeper; for there, as in other countries, where moors abound, it revels among the green mosses which so often cluster in these spots. These are the haunts which in summer-time the bird chooses for its nest, and from which its joyous song is poured forth in the air. Here we may see the pipit gradually rising, with quivering wing, till it is poised at a great height; and then begins that song, so soft, so musical, that we listen only to regret that the strain is finished, and that the ties of earth again draw the singer downward. Down it comes, with wings and tail outspread and motionless, and, like the sky-lark, in a slanting direction; and when on the ground, runs along over

spotted with brown; beak and feet brown; hind claw as long as the toe.

it, picking up the insects with great quickness. But autumn arrives, and the bird, which has sung its song by the grassy-bordered stream, or on the most cold and barren hills, retreats to more sheltered meadows, or to turnip-fields, or similar places; great numbers congregating there, and becoming, after the autumnal months, so much brighter and more deeply coloured, that this pipit has often, at this season, been mistaken for another species.

Besides the mode of flight, whose quivering motion has been described, the pipit, when not singing, has another, which consists of successive jerks, at no very great height from the ground; and it sometimes sings, too, while hovering over its nest, and occasionally when perched on a stone. Its nest is made of the dried stems of grasses, or other plants, and lined with hair. It is hidden on the ground, under a clump of leaves or coarse grass, or beneath the boughs of a low bush; and the pale-brown eggs are thickly speckled with dark purplish brown. The pipit is called *Pipi*, in French; the Germans call it *Piep;* and the Danes, *Pibe.* It is one of the commonest of our native songsters, and bird-

fanciers prize its song when in captivity, and call it the pipit-lark.

Though the meadow-pipit resides all the year in our land, the Tree Pipit* (*Anthus arboreus*) only finds here its summer home, coming to us in April, and quitting us late in September; the male birds preceding the female, and as soon as they arrive, doing their best to contribute to the melody of spring. This is the finest singer of the whole genus, beginning its song with a little low twitter, which rises by degrees, and is succeeded by a sweet warble. The song is sometimes sung by the bird on a tree, from "the topmost twig which looks up at the sky;" but more frequently it is uttered in the air, and the bird, when it ceases, comes sailing down slowly to the bough whence it took its flight.

The haunt of the tree-pipit is the border of the woodland, or the plantation or orchard, or the hedgerow which skirts the meadow or green lane, and although not usually numerous, yet it is very

* The Tree Pipit is six inches and a half in length. The plumage closely resembles that of the meadow pipit, but the spots on the breast are fewer, and the white of the outmost tail-feather is less extensive and less pure; the hind claw is shorter than the toe.

generally diffused throughout most of the cultivated districts of England, and in many places, as in some neighbourhoods of London, is very plentiful. In colour it resembles the meadow-pipit, but the greater length of claw, and the less slender beak, are characteristics of the tree species. That excellent observer of birds, Mr. Blyth, remarks, too, some other peculiarities. He says that it is more "equally poised on the centre of gravity, whence also its attitudes are very different, and its movements are far more deliberate, than those of its congeners. The mode of progression is indeed quite different, though ambulatory in both instances; the slow gait of the tree-pipit contrasting strongly with the nimbler run of all the others; which latter is again very unlike the quick step of the larks. In captivity it is an extremely healthy bird, and moults very freely; thrives upon almost any sort of food, and delights to bathe and wash itself in a pan of water. The other pipits, however, and also the wagtails, are very difficult to maintain in a captive state; they refuse to wash themselves, and suffer very much at the moulting period, both in spring and autumn. *I never* knew one, or a wagtail, to change its

plumage well in the cage. All the latter, too, are very snappish in confinement towards other birds, a trait of character which is not observable in the tree-pipit." Our bird is the tit-lark of the London birdcatchers, and in Germany it is frequently caught in October in great numbers, by nets, in the oat-fields, where it then congregates in flocks.

The tree-pipit has two broods in the season. It makes a nest of grasses and other stems, mingled with moss and hair, which it hides under a bush or a tuft of foliage. Four or five eggs may be found in it, of a greyish-white colour, dashed with brown. Mr. Blyth says that this bird is remarkable for the loose hold of its feathers, which, if the bird is handled, come out more easily than those of any other.

Another species, the Rock Pipit* (*Anthus petrosus*), is a resident bird, and a very frequent one, and being abundant only on the rocky shores of our island, is often called the sea-lark or rock-

* The Rock Pipit is six inches and three quarters in length. It is scarcely to be distinguished from the two preceding species, except by the superiority of size, and by the greater length and curvature of the hind claw; the breast, however, is rather clouded than spotted with brown.

lark, while the birdcatchers call it the mud-lark, and it is sometimes termed the dusky-lark. It is a very common bird on the southern shores of England, as well as in several parts of Scotland and Wales, and is well known to most who live on our shores. It is amusing to watch the motions of this little bird as it runs along the sandy margin, picking up the shell-fish from the mass of sea-weed, and making a merry note as it finds one there, or lying loose on the sand. It seems the most sprightly of birds, and has a joy in its very motion; and when the waters are falling gently and musically upon the rocky coast, the sweet song which it sings to them has a peculiar charm. It is not among those old rugged cliffs which bend over the sea that we look for song,—the harsh notes of the sea-birds, though in unison with the wild solitudes, have little of melody. But when our rock-pipit pours forth its sweet low tones, the notes are so like those which we are accustomed to hear among green fields and shady woods, that the thoughts involuntarily turn to those secluded inland spots, which to those whose early days were spent in the country, seem lovelier than the *sandy* or rock-bound coast. It is almost the only

singing bird whose voice we hear there, and so adapted is the seashore to its habits and necessities, that not even the rigorous cold of winter drives it inland; though now and then, during autumn, a few of these birds go to the heaths, which to them must bear some resemblance to the downs of the coast. It may be seen too, running over the grass of the salt marshes, and picking up the worms and salt-water insects, which lie hid in the pools and soft earth there; but it never congregates in flocks. In its mode of flight, its call, and song-notes, it is very similar to the meadow-pipit, which, as well as itself, loves the rocky shore, and sometimes sings there its gentle songs.

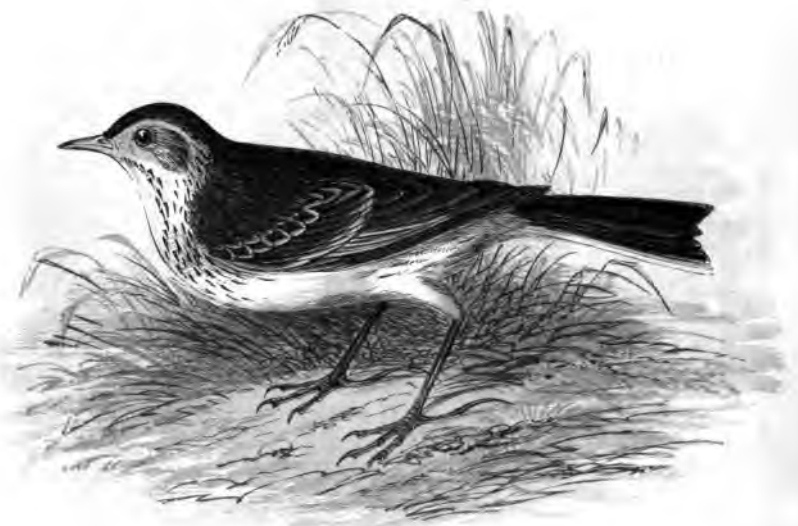
The rocks near the shore are often very beautiful when we are near enough to see the low grasses and flowers which are peculiar to them. It is among their crevices that our rock-pipit builds its nest, gathering thence for the little structure the dried grasses and seaweeds of which it is composed, and carolling near those crevices its early morning song. The nest is lined with fine grass or hair, and the eggs are of a pale yellowish grey, spotted and mottled with reddish-brown. If this pipit builds on the marsh its nest is placed on the ground.

The Great Pipit, or Richard's Pipit (*Anthus Richardi*,) though claiming, from its occasional visits, and its sweet song, a short notice, can hardly be called a British bird. It is a rare straggler to the south of England. It is much like the meadow species in manners and habits, though a larger bird, and its summer and winter changes of plumage, precisely similar. It is found in the warmer countries of Europe, but is truly a native of Africa.

Before passing onwards the Buntings require some mention, for although they are no great singers, they contribute in some small degree to the pleasant sounds of nature. These birds are distinguished from most of our small birds by a knob on the upper part of the bill, which they use as an anvil, on which to break nuts, grain, or other seeds. These and insects constitute their food.

Everybody knows the common Yellow Bunting, or Yellow Ammer* (*Emberiza citrinella*), whose bright yellow plumage is to be seen everywhere

* The Yellow Ammer is seven inches in length. Head and neck bright yellow, spotted with black; upper parts reddish-brown, spotted with yellow; wings and tail dusky black, edged with yellow; whole under parts bright yellow, spotted on the *breast with* reddish-brown; beak bluish-grey; feet pale brown.



on our hedges, and whose note, somewhat harsh as it is, is a familiar sound to all used to the country. Yet one whose ear was well attuned to all the melodies of nature, could find pleasure in listening to its song, and find in it a music too. Thus Graham speaks of it—

"I even love the Yellow Hammer's song.
When earliest buds begin to bulge, his note
Simple, reiterated oft, is heard
On leafless brier, or half-grown hedgerow tree;
Nor does he cease his note till autumn's leaves
Fall fluttering round his golden head so bright.
Fair plumaged bird! cursed by the causeless hate
Of every schoolboy, still by me thy lot
Was pitied! Never did I tear thy nest:
I loved thee, pretty bird! for 'twas thy nest
Which first, unhelp'd by older eyes, I found.
The very spot I think I now behold!
Forth from my low-roof'd home I wander'd blythe,
Down to thy side, sweet Cart, where 'cross the stream
A range of stones, below a shallow ford,
Stood in the place of iron spanning arch;
Up from that ford a little bank there was,
With alder-copse and willow overgrown,
Now worn away by mining winter floods;
There at a bramble root, sunk in the grass,
The hidden prize, of wither'd field straws form'd,
Well lined with many a coil of hair and moss,
And in it laid five red-vein'd spheres I found;
The Syracusan's voice did not exclaim
The grand Eureka with more rapturous joy,
Than at that moment flutter'd round my heart."

As might be supposed of so common a bird, it has many rustic names. In country places it is known as the Yoit, Yellow Yoldrin, Yellow Yowley, and Yellow Yeldrick, and in Cambridgeshire the author heard it called the writing lark, from the tracings on its eggs, which are fancied to resemble manuscript. Yarrell makes the following remarks on the spelling of the word: "I have ventured to restore to this bird, what I believe to have been its first English name, Yellow Ammer, although it appears to have been printed Yellow Ham, and Yellow Hammer, from the days of Dr. William Turner and Merrett, to the present time. The word Ammer is a well-known German term for Bunting in very common use: thus Bechstein employs the names *Schnee-ammer*, *Grau-ammer*, *Rohr-ammer*, *Garten-ammer*, for our Snow Bunting, Corn Bunting, Reed Bunting, Ortolan, or Garden Bunting, and Yellow Bunting. Prefixing the letter H to the word appears to be unnecessary and even erroneous, as suggesting a notion which has no reference to any known habit or quality in the bird." The Germans call our bird also Gold-ammer, Ammering, and Gold-ammering, and it is *the Goldspink* and Groning of the Swedes. The

well-known summer song of this bird rings out from every wayside, consisting of one note repeated five or six times, and two others, the last much lengthened. Some little variation occurs in this strain, and Mr. Main remarks that the cowboys find in the yellow ammer's song the following words, "A lit-tle bit of bread, but no cheese." White of Selborne remarked of the bunting that it persists in singing after Midsummer with more steadiness than any other bird.

The nest of this yellow ammer, well made of moss, roots, and hair, is usually placed in the grass-covered bank of a ditch or stream, or under a bush on the ground. The eggs are of a pale purplish white, marked with dark reddish brown. The bird is a favourite delicacy in Italy, and is caught and fattened for the table with the ortolan. One of the Italian names for another species, the green-headed bunting, is *Hortolano,* and this species is also sometimes called the English ortolan.

In winter the yellow buntings assemble in flocks with several of the finch tribe, and hunt in the farm-yards for grain, seeds, or insects. It is common in every part of our country.

The common or Corn Bunting (*Emberiza miliaria*), which remains also with us throughout the year, and is a very common bird, has still fewer pretensions to musical powers than the yellow ammer; but during spring and summer its harsh notes often reach our ear as they are uttered when perched on the top of the hedge, or on a low tree, or while flying from bough to bough. It is sometimes rather mischievous, and has been known completely to strip a rick of barley of its thatching, leaving it quite bare of shelter. This it did by deliberately pulling out straw by straw, to search for any grain which might have been left in the ear.

Very similar to the song of the corn bunting is that of the Reed* or Black-headed species (*Emberiza schœniclus*), which is sung for an hour or two at a time, to cheer his companion as he sits watching near her perched on some bush, where

* The Reed Bunting is six inches in length. Head, cheeks chin, throat, and breast deep black; back and wing-coverts black with chestnut edges; the colour separated from the black of the head by a broad collar of white; tail dark brown with reddish edges, the two outer feathers on each side white; sides of the breast and under parts white; beak and feet brown. In the *female* the black of the head and throat is wanting.

CORN BUNTING.

his beautiful black head, contrasted with the white collar, are very conspicuous. The song consists but of two or three continually repeated notes, which if listened to for any time become monotonous and tedious; but which, to the passer-by, who hears but little, seem not altogether unmusical. This bird inhabits the borders of ponds and sides of lakes, dwelling among the green willows and the brown reeds, and hiding its nest among the thick herbage at the side of the stream, or at the base of some low bush at a short distance from the ground. It is made of moss and water grasses, lined with hair and finer species of grass. The eggs are four or five in number, of a pale purplish brown, streaked with darker brown. The food of this species consists of grain and seeds, and of those insects which hover so numerously about the waters, or their larvæ. It is a frequent bird on marshy lands.

The Cirl Bunting* (*Emberiza cirlus*) is peculiar to the sea-coast, never going far inland. Its song

* The Cirl Bunting is six inches and a half in length. The head is olive, streaked with black and yellow; the back chestnut; wings and tail dusky black with reddish edges; chin and throat black bounded by a crescent of yellow; under parts dull yellowish, with a band of brown across the belly.

is very similar to that of the yellow ammer which it resembles also in most of its habits though it does not, like that bird, come out boldly to be looked at, but gets to the summit of some high tree, especially an elm, and sings its song somewhat more rapidly, and without the finishing note given by the other bunting. It builds in a furze or some low bush. It is very common on some parts of our coast, but is a local rather than a general species. Its eggs are of a dingy white, tinged with blue, and streaked and speckled with dark brown.

But though our common buntings are no great minstrels, yet some which are occasional stragglers to our land are more gifted with singing powers. The Lapland Bunting (*Plectrophanes Lapponica*) which, though truly a native of the Arctic shores, sometimes strays hither, is described by Bechstein as having when in captivity a song much like that of the linnet, while the female also warbles a little. The Snow Bunting* (*Emberiza*

* The Snow Bunting is seven inches in length. In winter the plumage is variegated with black, tawny, and white; a large part of the wing, and whole under parts white. In summer the tawny colour disappears, the head, face, and breast are white and the back black.

SNOW BUNTING.

glacialis), which is only a winter visitor with us, has a pleasing call-note to contribute to the music of nature. It is an inhabitant of the northern regions of Europe and America, visiting us in large flocks in autumn, and leaving in April. This species rarely perches on trees, but runs along the ground, and feeds on grass-seeds and other grains. When on the shores of the Polar Sea, its food in spring consists chiefly of the buds of that Arctic flower, the opposite-leaved saxifrage; and in autumn it has been observed to eat the shell-fish which lie about the foliage of the water plants.

Although, in a little volume on singing birds, the snow bunting can claim but a slight notice, yet an anecdote, related by Captain Lyon, of this bird, is too interesting to be left untold. When describing an Esquimaux burying-place, he says: "Near the large grave was a third pile of stones, covering the body of a child, which was coiled up. A snow bunting had found its way through the loose stones which composed this little tomb; and its now forsaken neatly built nest, was found placed on the neck of the child. As the snow bunting has all the domestic virtues of our English redbreast, it has always been considered by

us as the robin of these dreary wilds; and its lively chirp and fearless confidence, have rendered it respected by the most hungry sportsman. I could not, on this occasion, view its little nest, placed on the breast of infancy, without wishing that I possessed the power of poetically expressing the feelings that it excited."

It is not easy to ascertain whether the sparrow on the house-top, spoken of by David, be our common bird, or whether, as suggested on an earlier page, the bird mentioned by Mr. Waterton as the solitary sparrow or thrush, is the species intended. Our native species is frequent in Palestine. In our own land the Sparrow* (*Passer domesticus*) is to be met with everywhere,—in town and country; but the little bird in great cities, hopping about among the smoky chimneys, is very different in appearance from the blithe sparrow which chirps along the garden path, or among the bright flowers of the country lane, generally keeping near houses, and sharing any

* The House Sparrow is six inches in length. Crown of the head dull grey; the rest of the upper plumage chestnut brown, with blackish centres; chin and throat black; under parts dull greyish. The female wants the variegated tints of the plumage, and the black of the throat.

refuse which may be thrown from their doors. The country sparrow has a brighter plumage, which always seems too in better order, and as if more pains were bestowed in cleaning and trimming it. Everywhere, however, its character is the same, and it is among the boldest and most obtrusive birds, and is perpetually squabbling with its companions. The large thick head, short bill, and lively eyes of the sparrow are often before us, and it has not the graceful arch look of the redbreast, or its winning way of soliciting confidence, but has a look of audacity, which at once marks it as an assuming little bird. It cannot be called a singer in its wild state, but strange to say that chirping sparrow is neither wanting in voice nor ear. The Hon. Daines Barrington says, "I took a common sparrow from the nest, when it was fledged, and educated it under a linnet. The bird, however, by accident, heard a goldfinch also; and his song was therefore a mixture of the linnet and goldfinch." The sparrow always seems an intelligent little bird, and can accommodate itself to times and places exceedingly well; varying its tones, too, so as that we can very distinctly trace in its chirp sounds of joy, or fear, or

rage, or anger. Very often on a summer evening, large numbers of sparrows assemble in the trees, and keep up so long and loud a chorus of chirpings, that one might think it was a party of birds preparing for migration. These sparrow choruses may, however, be regarded as a prelude to a following day of sunshine, and probably arise from the happy feelings of the bird in the genial atmosphere. When the brown corn is cutting down, then is the joyous season for the sparrows. Away they fly in troops to the harvest field, to gather the grain which may be scattered from the full ears, and very merry they seem as they hop about in search of it. Their assemblies in spring are not so peaceful. Indeed they seem to be half their time in a rage, and their incessant combats at this season must have been remarked by all who notice the actions of birds, several sparrows uniting to pursue some hapless offender, till it drops down dead with fright, or from bodily injury.

The sparrow is an early builder, and the nest, though sometimes placed on the high branches of fruit-trees in gardens near to houses, is more often found under the eaves of tiles, or in holes or

crevices of walls near the dwellings of man. The extreme voracity of the sparrows in devouring fruits and vegetables and young flower-buds,—the determination with which they pull up every young radish, or the early sprouts of our mustard and cress,—their devastation among the peas in summer, which they will get at by opening the pods; these and similar misdemeanors render them very obnoxious to the gardener. If, however, it were possible to exterminate the whole race of sparrows, our gardens would, in all probability, be in a worse condition than now; for they consume, especially while they have young ones, an incredible number of soft-bodied caterpillars and moths, which would, were they suffered to live, commit greater injury to vegetation than they.

Though some of the traits of the sparrow's disposition are certainly less pleasing than those of other birds, yet many instances are recorded of their affection for their nestlings, which might win our regard. Smellie relates a very remarkable case of this. "When I was a boy," he says, "I carried off a nest of young sparrows, about a mile from my place of residence. After the nest was completely moved, and while I was marching

home with them in triumph, I perceived with some degree of astonishment both the parents following me, at some distance, and observing my motions in perfect silence. A thought then struck me that they might follow me home, and feed the young according to their usual manner. On first entering the door, I held up the nest and made the young ones utter their cry expressive of the desire of food. I immediately put the nest of the young in a wire cage, and placed it outside a window." The author then relates that having concealed himself, he saw the parent birds come in, with their bills filled with small caterpillars, and that after a little chattering the young birds were fed. This was continually repeated till they were fledged. The narrator then placed the strongest of the young birds outside the cage, and no sooner did the parents arrive, with their load of food, than seeing one of their family thus emancipated, they fluttered about, making most noisy manifestations of joy, both with wing and voice; until, after a time, this tumult was followed by what might seem a "calm and soothing conversation." They evidently wished their young bird to fly, while he, by a feeble cry, evinced his timidity.

TREE SPARROW.

Their solicitations were urged incessantly, and they flew again and again, from the cage, to a neighbouring chimney-pot, as if to show the pupil how this might be done. At last he took courage, and reached the post in safety. Next day another young bird was released, and again the same scene followed, until all the four young ones were freed from captivity, and became tenants of air. But never again did sparrow or nestling revisit that cage. It had no pleasing associations to endear it, and they had learned too well the worth of freedom, again to risk its loss.

The nest of the sparrow is made of straw, and placed sometimes in trees, and often in ivy, or under the eaves of houses.

The Tree Sparrow* or Mountain Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) has a little more pretension to be called a song bird, than has the house species. Mr. Blyth says that its notes are not altogether despicable, being far superior to those of the bramble-finch. Like the common species, he remarks, it has a great variety of chirrups; one of

* The Tree Sparrow is distinguished from the house sparrow by a brighter plumage, and by having the sides of the neck handsomely *striped* and clouded with black and pure white.

which is peculiarly musical and sweet, and may be rendered "pee-eu-weep." Its proper song consists of a number of these chirps, intermixed with some pleasing notes, delivered in a continuous unbroken strain, sometimes for many minutes together; very loudly, and having a characteristic sparrow-like tone throughout.

The tree sparrow is a much handsomer bird than our familiar species, to which however it has a general resemblance. Sometimes its feathers are puffed out, so as to render it particularly like its congeners: but at other times, and especially when the bird is alarmed, its figure is seen to be much more slender, as its plumage then lies closer. It is very different from the common sparrow in its habits, being a wild shy bird, avoiding the presence of man and his habitations, and dwelling in the country by the borders of woods, and among the willows of the brook. It is sometimes found in the thicker recesses of our woodlands; but so far from deserving the name of mountain sparrow, it apparently prefers low lands, and is more abundant in the flats of Lincolnshire than in any other part of Britain. Its English name of tree sparrow is more indicative of its haunts.

This species builds in old trees or walls, and its nest is made of dried grass, lined with feathers. Its eggs are from four to six in number, of a dull white colour, speckled with light grey brown. It is not a common bird in Britain, but is scattered over the colder parts of Asia and Europe. When hopping on the ground it may be easily known from the common sparrow, by its different gait, its legs being much shorter than those of that species. When it alights on a spot, it will keep perpetually moving the tail, lowering and raising it, and fluttering restlessly.

CHAPTER IX.

GOLDFINCH—SISKIN—BRAMBLING—CHAFFINCH—LINNET—MOUNTAIN LINNET—LESSER REDPOLE—MEALY LINNET—GREEN LINNET—HAWFINCH—CROSSBILL—BULLFINCH.

SOME very sweet singers, as well as very pretty and interesting birds, are found in the finch tribe. No one accustomed to the country, will fail at once to recal some of them, as the goldfinch, the chaffinch, the linnet, and others as among their favourites; while no tribe is more remarkable for the compactness and beauty of their nests. Many a rambler among our spring green woods will agree with Hurdis—

> "I love to see the little goldfinch pluck
> The groundsels feather'd seed, and twit and twit;
> And then in bower of apple blossoms perch'd,
> Trim his gay suit, and pay us with a song."

A sweet and merry songster is the Goldfinch *

* The Goldfinch is five inches in length. Crown and pole black, descending in a half collar; face crimson; sides of head and neck white; back dusky brown; wings and tail black, tipped with white; wing crossed by a broad band of yellow; under parts dull whitish-brown; beak whitish; feet flesh-colour.

(*Carduelis elegans*), a docile gentle bird, delighting the eye both by its brilliant plumage and graceful motion, while the strain, if not so rich and varied as some others, is not deficient in melody. When summer is not yet come, and only an occasional gleam of sunshine makes us dream of spring, while leaves are scarcely opening, and flowers are few, the song of the goldfinch is heard from the orchard tree, and all the neighbourhood echoes to its long continued strain. But when the joyous month of May is in its glory of leaves, and the trees are white or rose-tinted with their blossoms, the song is richer and fuller in its tone, and salutes the ear of him who goes at dawn of day to his labours, and cheers him when again he seeks his home at evening. One grieves, while listening to its happy tones, to think that when autumn comes the bird-catcher may make our favourite a captive. It is not prized as a cage bird so much for its song, as for its docility in learning various little accomplishments. Some of the birds, when taken, are destined to mope and die in cages, longing for that pure air and liberty for which they are fitted; but some will live, and apparently enjoy life, even when deprived of all which would

seem to make life an enjoyment to a bird. The goldfinch has more sociability and less of rivalry than some other species, and will thrive best if its captivity is shared with companions. If a mirror is placed in its cage it will go and look at itself in the glass, take the hemp-seeds, one by one, and eat before it; not, it would seem, from motives of personal admiration, but from the idea that it was enjoying its meal in company. It may be made to acquire a great precision in its movements, and to perform a variety of little feats. Thus it will learn to draw water in a small bucket, to fire tiny cannons, and, to counterfeit death exactly at the proper moment. Bingley, in his Animal Biography, gives an account of some acts of this kind. Some years ago, he tells us, the Sieur Roman exhibited in this country the wonderful performances of several goldfinches, linnets, and canaries. One appeared to be dead, and was held up by the tail or claw without exhibiting any signs of life. A second stood on its head, with its claws in the air: a third imitated a Dutch milkmaid, going to market with pails on its shoulders. A fourth mimicked a Venetian girl, looking out of a window. A *fifth* represented a soldier, on guard as a sentinel.

The sixth was a cannoneer, wore a cap on its head, held a firelock in its claw, and discharged a small cannon. Then it acted as if it had been wounded, while another bird wheeled it away in a little barrow, as if conveying it to an hospital; after which it flew away before all the assembled party. One bird turned a small windmill; and another little creature had been trained to stand in the midst of fireworks, and exhibit no signs of fear while they were exploding all around it.

It is truly wonderful to see how so volatile a creature as a bird can thus be made to subdue, for a time, its natural impulses, which, after all, must still remain unchanged, and must subject the poor bird to great misery. Perhaps cruelty may not, in all cases, be practised by those who thus discipline the birds, yet it is hardly possible to conceive that so much can be effected without it. Many who now sit, admiring spectators of similar performances, would turn away with sickening sensations of horror, could they discern the means used in teaching them. Every kind-hearted person would surely discourage exhibitions of this sort, did they know the processes which are employed, at *least* by some of those who thus train

birds. Various writers who have witnessed these public performances have recorded the different deeds of severity by means of which the goldfinches were awed into docility and skill by their teachers. We can but rejoice that in our country at least, we are not often, in the present day, invited to behold accomplishments of this kind, for it is sad to think that the creatures which God made to minister to the finer sensibilities of our nature, should be turned, by cruel man, into victims of agony, to give an hour's amusement to the thoughtless.

It is pleasing to turn from instances in which the natural intelligence of the goldfinch has been thus directed, to one exhibited by this bird in its untaught condition. "It was very early in the spring of 1837," says a writer in the Magazine of Natural History, "that a bird had been lost from a cage, which was still hanging up, with the door open, in the passage entrance to the back court of a gentleman's house in Exmouth, when a goldfinch was one morning found feeding in it, and the door was closed upon it; but on inspection, as it appeared to be a female, it was very shortly after restored to liberty. In the space, how-

ever, of about two hours it returned, and entered the cage, when it was again shut in, and again liberated; and these visits were repeated daily, for a considerable time. She was then missing for some few days, but then returned, accompanied by a male bird; she entered the cage, and fed as usual; but her companion, after perching on the outside of the cage, retired to a neighbouring tree, until she joined him. They then quitted, and were no more thought of; but at the end of seven or eight weeks she again made her appearance, and accompanied, not by her former companion, but by four young ones, when she again entered the cage and fed as usual; but as she could not induce her brood, for such they were presumed to be, to follow her example, she finally went off with them, and has not since that time again made her appearance."

The goldfinch is a very affectionate little bird, soon learning to love those who treat it kindly; making a low murmuring noise of pleasure when its owner approaches its cage, and evincing great delight at his return after an absence. Like many affectionate natures, it is apt to desire the exclusive love of the object of its regard, and shows

great displeasure in seeing another caressed. It is also very fond of its young, and nothing will interrupt the patience of the hen bird in sitting, while her mate watches carefully over her, singing to her from a neighbouring tree, only flying off at an approaching footstep, in order to attract the attention from the nest, and returning to the post immediately after. This elegant little structure is composed externally of vegetable fibres, moss and lichens; and when the down of plants or wool can be procured, these are woven into a compact felt, with such skill, that Knapp well characterises the little architect, as "that inimitable spinner, that Arachne of the groves." The neatly rounded nest is lined, and made warm and comfortable by down gathered from the leaf of the early coltsfoot; or in the later year from the thistle, and five or six eggs are placed there of a bluish white colour, spotted with brown towards the larger end. By the time in which the goldfinch builds, the leaves are thickening on the trees, and the nest is hidden by them on the flexible branch of the fruit tree, where the young ones are rocked, as in a cradle by the winds. Sometimes a garden evergreen is selected as a

spot in which to place the little home which is the object of so much skill and care, and evinces so great a taste in the builder for order and beauty.

We owe much to the goldfinch as well as to the other finch tribe for their prevention of the growth of weeds. Their young are fed on seeds macerated in the crop, and these are chiefly of the downy kind, which else would wing their way over gardens and fields, and bring up a crop so abundant, that the earth would have no room for other plants.

It is true that the goldfinch may occasionally steal the seeds of some garden plant which we might wish to secure; but when we think how prodigious a quantity of these downy seeds are to be found in our fields and hedgerows, we may indeed welcome the aid of the bird in securing them from dispersion. The Great Creator designed doubtless many of those seeds for the especial use of the fowls of the air. Thus, not to mention the dandelions, and groundsels, the coltsfoots, and hawkweeds which everywhere abound, the one family of thistles alone would supply enough of its beautiful crowned seeds to overrun

the land, were there not some means of waste. It is pleasing to watch the goldfinch in the months of July and August, when the very air is full of floating thistle down,

> "Suddenly halting now—a lifeless stand!
> Then starting off again with freak as sudden,
> In all its sportive wanderings, all the while,
> Making report of an invisible breeze
> That was its wings, its chariot, and its horse,
> Its playmate,—rather say, its moving soul."

It is pleasing to watch the bird's joy as it sits pecking at the thistle tuft. Happily, though the wind is bearing away so many of the seeds, and casting all which are destined to prove fertile on their fitting soils, yet many are left in tufts, to show where the rich purple flower has been; and quite late in the autumn, the goldfinch may be seen flitting about the hedges, twitting and pecking at the thistle down. The French call the bird *Chardonneret*, from *Chardon* a thistle. The scientific appellation, *Carduelis*, is also formed from *Carduus*, the botanic name of a genus of the plant; and the bird is besides in some country-places called Thistle-finch, and is the *Distelfink* of the Germans. Our country people also term this

favourite bird Goldwing, and the Scotch call it the Goldspink or Goldie.

During winter the goldfinches often congregate in flocks, and repair to some spot well supplied with thistles, plantains, groundsel, and other plants which furnish them with food, when they suddenly alight, and are immediately busy in their searches; but as soon as spring comes round, they are to be found in the woods and gardens, building their nests, and singing their happy welcome to warm showers and sunshine.

The goldfinch is very abundant, and is pretty generally diffused throughout Europe. It is common in the Greek Isles, and though not a migratory bird, yet it removes during winter either to the continent or to the largest islands. The Greeks call it *Karedreno.*

The Siskin,* or Aberdevine (*Carduelis spinus*), is scarcely inferior to the goldfinch in its power of learning the various little performances for which

* The Siskin is about four inches and a half in length. Upper parts greenish-olive, streaked with black; crown and face black; wings and their coverts black tipped with yellow; rump yellow; tail-feathers yellow with black tips; chin and throat black; under parts yellowish, streaked with black; beak and feet brown.

that bird is prized by those who keep it in a cage. Many of the least difficult of these tricks are taught by those who are able to bestow time and attention on their little favourites, and are quite unaccompanied by any practice of cruelty. Thus, the siskin soon learns to come to its master or mistress at the sound of a little bell; and to draw up the water for its own refreshment, by means of a small bucket. When kept in an aviary it is one of the liveliest of birds, always awaking among the earliest, and singing so as to invite the others to a chorus; while it is so mild in its temper, that it never quarrels with the other birds. It seems constantly in a gay singing mood, and when not thus occupied, it is to be seen with its bill arranging its feathers, so as to be always cleanly and unruffled. No birds are easier tamed than these, for they will begin to eat directly after being made captives, and will build in a room and rear their young amid the boughs hung there for their use or pleasure. Mr. Gardiner mentions that a friend of his kept a pair of siskins, which built their nest of moss and cotton, with which they were supplied. They, however, showed so decided a preference to the cotton, that on a quantity of this

substance being put into their cage, they destroyed the nearly completed nest, and began to build another of their favourite material. He describes this second structure as "an elegant, warm, cozy little habitation, similar in construction to that of the chaffinch, but of smaller dimensions." "It was," he says, "truly delightful to observe how admirably these little songsters performed their parental duties; the female bird never once leaving the nest, during the fourteen days of incubation, and afterwards both birds watching and feeding their callow brood, with unwearied patience and unceasing fondness."

If we consider that spot of the world in which the bird rears its young to be its native land, then the siskin can hardly be classed among our native birds, for it only visits us during the winter, coming just as the swallow departs, sometimes arriving in Britain in considerable numbers; at others, in smaller flocks. A few of the siskins, indeed, build in some of the pine woods of the highlands of Scotland; and Sir William Jardine and Mr. Selby saw these birds, in pairs, in the month of June, near Killin, but from the great height of the trees

found it impossible to procure their nests. Mr. Thompson is also of opinion that the siskin probably builds in the north of Ireland. The favourite resorts of the bird are plantations of larch, alder, and birch-trees, and during their winter stay, they feed chiefly on the seeds of these trees; while in Germany, Norway, and Sweden, where they abound, the nest is placed on the very highest branches of the pine. Bechstein says that the siskin is so common in villages of Germany, and so courageous, that any one residing near an alder grove, need only put one of these birds in the window, near a stick covered with bird-lime, and he may catch as many as he pleases. The siskins, during the month of October, injure the hop grounds of Germany very materially, by eating the seeds of the plant; and in France they are accused of despoiling the orchards in spring, by pecking at the flowers of the fruit trees.

These birds fly at a great height, and their movements are very active and graceful. They are large eaters, and in captivity will consume so much food as to endanger their lives. They share, during autumn, with the goldfinch, in the feast of

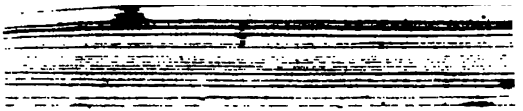
thistle-down, which the winds and rains have spared; and climb, and cling, and flit about in most beautiful attitudes. Their song is not powerful, but very sweet; not so plaintive as that of the linnet, nor so sprightly as that of the goldfinch; and the sweetness of the strain is now and then interrupted by a jarring note, similar to that made by the nightingale, when angry. The Saxon stocking-weavers fancy that its tones resemble the noise made by the loom, and are accordingly very fond of the siskin. This indefatigable singer can also imitate the notes of other birds, as the chaffinch, or the lark, but it cannot learn to repeat a musical air.

In Germany, where the siskin remains throughout the year, the nest is fixed to the top of a pine or fir-tree, with the entangling threads of the web wrought by the spider or caterpillar. It is formed of small twigs, and lined with vegetable fibres; and it contains four or five eggs, of a greyish white, spotted with red.

It is among the dark old forests of the North, where the rough cold winds sweep in among the evergreen branches, and bronzed trunks of the firs, that another of our winter visitants rears its young.

The Brambling* or Mountain Finch (*Fringilla montifringilla*) comes in winter, not only to our island, but is spread generally all over the European continent, leaving the wild mountainous region which is its place of song, till the snows shall have melted from hill, and plain, and bough, being more numerous here in the severe than in the milder winters. This species is not, however, at any time very abundant in our larch plantations, but in beech woods, in some other countries, it comes in great abundance. Bechstein says that these birds assemble in the beech forests of Thuringia, in immense numbers, coming from the north in parties consisting of 100,000 individuals. It is generally in captivity a bold and hardy bird. Mr. Blyth remarks —"Were I to judge of the temper and disposition of the bramble finch, from one which I kept in confinement last summer, I should call it one of the most untameable of birds; but were I to form

* The Brambling is six inches and three quarters in length. Head and back rich black (in winter freckled with brown); wing-coverts fawn colour with two black bands; quills black, with tawny edges; rump white, varied with black; tail black with pale edges; throat, breast, and sides rich fawn colour; lower parts white; interior surface of the wing yellow at the shoulder; beak blue in summer, yellowish in winter; feet light brown.



AMERICAN

my judgment from the individual which I possess at present, I should on the contrary deem it to be very familiar and confiding." This bird is sometimes called *Grosbeak d' Ardennes*, and is thought by Mr. Broderip to be the *Pinson d' Ardenne* of the old French author Belon. Of its song nothing seems certainly known, but it appears to be less musical than most of the finches. Its call is merely a monotonous chirp. Besides the seeds of the fir tribe, it greedily devours those of our most common plant, the knot grass.

But leaving the more rare birds, for one whose song is known to every country resident, we must pass on to the Chaffinch* (*Fringilla cœlebs*), whose lively call-note, and varied strain, may be heard as soon as those of the blackbird, and while the chilling winds of February are resounding through the leafless trees. Now it perches on the wall, picking out the seeds from that little white-

* The Chaffinch is six inches in length. Head and neck dark grey; back chestnut; wings black with two bands of white; the quills edged with pale brown; tail black, the outer feathers partly white; face, ear-coverts, and whole under parts reddish-brown, brightest on the breast; beak blue; feet brown. The female has all the colours more subdued, and more nearly uniform.

flowered plant the whitlow grass, which grows in such numbers there; now it is away to the roadside, to peck at the young buds and seeds of the groundsel or chickweed, which may be seen already offering their green buds, and small blossoms; or it hunts among the young green blade of the cornfield, for the ivy-leaved speedwell, whose blue flowers are even, in early spring, already passing into seed. The author of the Journal of a Naturalist says too, that the chaffinches will completely deflorate the spikes or whorls of the common red archangel, or dead nettle, which is one of our earliest blooming plants, and is to be seen, late in February and during the next two months, under every hedge. "At this season," our author says, "they may be seen with their little mouths quite full of the green seeds of this nettle." He adds too that they are, at the same period, sad plunderers of the kitchen garden, drawing up most dexterously young turnips and radishes as soon as they make their appearance; though after this time all depredations cease, and the rest of their days are spent in sportive innocence. They are among the birds too which peck at our crocuses and polyanthuses, and spoil their beauty.

But though the full-grown birds delight chiefly in a vegetable diet, it must not be forgotten that the young are fed almost wholly upon insects; and as the chaffinches have large and hungry broods, these birds are very valuable in gathering them from the trees and bushes. Selby remarks of the chaffinch, that in summer it feeds most upon insects and larvæ, and that he has witnessed its assiduity during the autumn, in devouring the females of a large species of aphis, which infests the trunks and stronger branches of the larch, and some other kinds of fir. A writer in Loudon's Magazine confirms this statement. "In the early part of last summer," he says, "our attention was attracted by a chaffinch, which, as we sat in our room, we observed to pay repeated visits to a broom bush, immediately in front of our window. The bird remained a considerable time in the bush at each visit, and appeared exceedingly busy about something, hopping from spray to spray. We suspected that the object of plunder was the soft young seeds of the broom, which, at that time, was much in the same state as peas are in when fit to gather. Upon examination, however, we found every part whole *and untouched*; but the bush was covered

with aphides, and these we ascertained, not the soft seeds, were what attracted the chaffinch. Whether the bird devoured the aphides itself, while in the bush, or, as we rather suspect, carried them off for the purpose of feeding the young brood, we cannot say; but an immense number of aphides must have been destroyed during its repeated visits."

Thus it is with several other of our small birds. They injure our flowers and buds, and we forget how much we owe to them, on the other hand, for their destruction of the insect race. The Great Creator has ordained that one living creature should prey upon another; and were one link wanting in the chain, which thus binds them as to a common destiny, the results would be more terrible than we can conceive. It is well known that the foliage and young fruits of orchards and gardens have greatly suffered from the habit of destroying those small birds, which would else have prevented the increase of insects. Mr. Curtis, the author of several valuable botanical works, paid great attention to this subject. He was the owner of large orchards, and so convinced was he, by long observation, of the utility of the small birds, that

he would not permit one of his servants to scare them away. Rooks, jays, and even sparrows are valuable in destroying various insects and their larvæ. The flycatcher, though it deserves its Kentish name of Cherry-sucker, yet is perpetually snapping at insects on the wing. The swallow tribe even leave the fruits and buds untouched, and destroy myriads of insects; and the titmice and other birds peer into the crevices on the barks of trees, or among the mosses and grasses, and carry off the creeping things by thousands. We have only to consider how immense is the number of insects, even in our own land, where they are far less numerous than in tropical countries, and we shall estimate better the instrumentality of the birds. Messrs. Kirby and Spence, after instituting a comparison between the numbers of British insects with that of British flowering plants, conclude, that on the average there are more than six species of insect to each species of vegetable. "If," say they, "we reckon the flowering vegetables of the globe in round numbers at 100,000 species, the number of insects would amount to 600,000. If we say 400,000 we shall perhaps not be very wide of the truth." If such is the

number of species, that of individuals must be countless as the grains of sand or the drops of ocean.

Were it not for the aid of birds in effecting the destruction of these beautiful but often destructive creatures, the very air would become insupportable from their numbers, and the earth would be made barren by their devastations. Not only would they give pain to man and the lower animals by their stings, or annoy our ears by a perpetual hum, but our very food would be rendered disgusting by their eggs. In the hotter climates, where they are permitted to increase in larger proportion than the birds which feed on them, they become an annoyance which is almost insupportable; and were it not in those lands that birds are found to lessen their numbers, the locusts and others of the tribe would soon leave the earth without a remnant of green; and the mosquitos and other insects would in time, even exterminate man from the face of the earth.

The chaffinch is one of the handsomest of our song birds, and one of the most common birds too. We are all ready to admit that its song is sweet and varied, and even its call-note of "twink,

twink," is not unmusical. Yet English ears are not delighted with the music as are those of Germany. The Germans have marked with the greatest accuracy all the niceties of the strain; and if the bird finishes it by the word "fink," the birdcatchers prize it more highly for what they call its amen. No price is thought too high for the purchase of a well-trained chaffinch, and as the inhabitants of Thuringia will sometimes give a cow in exchange for a bird distinguished for its song, a common proverb is in use, "Such a chaffinch is worth a cow." Artisans have been known to go ninety miles from home to take with bird-lime one of these birds, reputed for its song; and a common workman will give a louis d'or (sixteen shillings,) for a good singer. Bechstein, who partakes in the national enthusiasm for this bird, says, "that he could, if he liked, write a good sized volume on all the details of its music." Even the cries which indicate the passions and wants of the chaffinch are minutely recorded by this excellent observer of singing birds. "Trif, traf," is its note of tenderness, which is thought also to foretell the change of weather. Its call-note is "*iak, iak*;" and its cry of "fink, fink," from

which its German name is derived, is, he says, mechanical and involuntary.

The following songs or melodies sung by the chaffinch, are those which are chiefly prized in Saxony and Hesse. Some of them are heard in the woods, but they are chiefly produced by educating the voice of the bird.

1. The double Trill of the Hartz, which Bechstein says, an amateur cannot hear without being in a perfect ecstasy. 2. The Rider's Song. 3. The Wine Song, which has also several subdivisions. 4. The Bridegroom's Song. 5. The double Trill, which Bechstein says can only be heard in the house, and is so deep and powerful that it can scarcely be conceived how the larynx of so small a bird can produce such sounds. 6. The Good Year Song, with two subdivisions. 7. The Quakin Song, which was formerly much admired, but which seems now to be almost extinct in Germany, as our author considered that he possessed at that time the only bird which could perform it. 8. The Pithia, or Trewithia, which he says is a very uncommon and agreeable song, never heard but in the depths of the Thuringian mountains.

Its oft-repeated cry in our woods of "fink, fink," has obtained for our bird the name of Pink, Spink, and Twink; by one or other of which it is well known in various country places; while its lively manners and gay plumage gave rise to the old proverb current in France, "As gay as a chaffinch." As light-hearted as a bird, is indeed a common comparison in every country, for of all creatures, birds seem the gayest. The young lamb frolicking at times on the green meadow, is at other moments staid and grave compared with them. And how should the bird be otherwise than gladsome? We all know something of the influence of a pure atmosphere both on mind and body. The bird breathes continually the purest air, and, removed by its soaring wing from the surface of earth, which is surcharged with vapours and exhalations; taking perpetually by its flight the most active exercise; following its own impulses in perfect freedom from every restraint,—how should the untamed bird fail to be a creature of wild joy? Made too as it is for a tenant of air, it is exquisitely fitted for facility of motion. Its whole framework is penetrated by air. It has large lungs, with appendages and prolongations, through

which it breathes with great rapidity, and imbibes a large quantity. Its bones are made light by cavities, filled with air instead of marrow; and the feathers admit air into their interstices. The wings of the bird, convex above, and concave below, are moved by most vigorous muscles; and the downy and feathery covering protects it better than aught else could do, from the sudden and great varietions of temperature to which it is exposed, and is at the same time of lightest nature. Every feather has a stem, hollow in part; and the barbs are all studded with lesser barbs, arranged with the greatest skill, and all of so little weight, that a feather has become a very type of lightness. We rarely find fossil bones of birds, and it is because of this lightness, for such as die on the water or fall into it, do not sink into the ground as other objects might do, before they had time to be wholly devoured or decomposed. What wonder that with a system so adapted for inhaling the pure air, and so well suited for motion, the bird should be impatient of repose, and need little sleep? that it should feel blithe and buoyant, and pour out its full heart in song? With its free and independent habits, and delicate sensations,

it is conscious, without dread, of atmospheric changes; and knows often of their approach long before they are made perceptible to our less sensitive organization. Its very song is rendered so full and loud by means of the volume of air which it can introduce into its throat, and the force with which it can expel it, that after long and loud warblings it usually presents no appearance of exhaustion. Who that, while listening to the song of the lark, as it wings its way to the sky, or watches the white dove as it glides among the dark greenwood, is not ready to say with the Psalmist, "Oh, that I had the wings of the dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest!" Yet that same capacity for flight would unfit us for thought and reflection; and by rendering us impetuous and volatile as the bird, would deprive us of the faculty of attention, by which alone our minds can gather greatness. There are hours when the solitude and silence of the forest might well harmonize with our feelings; yet, had we wings to wander thither, the ties of earth, with all its loves and friendships, would soon bring us back to our hearths and homes.

But to return to the merry bright-eyed chaffinch,

whose early song in field, or wood, or garden-hedge has so often delighted us; and which, beginning that song early in February, sings it till after Midsummer. When this bird is in captivity, it soon learns to imitate the songs of other birds, and may even be taught to articulate some words. On some parts of the continent, where the song is prized, the cruel practice is used of depriving it of its sight to improve its music. The poor little bird may sing the better, because it can no longer be amused or distracted by surrounding objects; but he must have a hard heart who could listen to its singing with any emotion save that of sorrow and pity; for the perpetual turning of the head of the blind and helpless creature, would prevent our forgetting, even for a moment, the restless spirit within, or the cruel act which bound that bird to sorrow.

But it is among its native boughs that we love to see it framing its nest with busy care, and with most tasteful skill, and of such colours as to resemble the objects surrounding it; forming it of wool and moss, and adorning it with white or green lichens, gathered from the time-stained tree, and perhaps stealing the threads of the spider's web

to help to twine it together. It is lined with wool, over which there is a layer of hair and feathers; and this elegant little structure, which is hardly surpassed in beauty by that of any other European bird, is placed on the tree or thickly-branched shrub, sometimes among the boughs of the pear or apple-tree, or in the holly or ivy. It is made by the female bird alone; but during the time when she is hatching, her mate in some measure atones for his former remissness, by never quitting her except to procure food, which he brings back and shares with her; and no sooner are the young birds hatched, than both parents are actively employed in feeding them, hunting most diligently for the soft-bodied insects and caterpillars which suit them best, or bringing them, when these fail, or when their increased powers can better digest them, the grains of corn, which they extricate for them from the husk with great dexterity.

The chaffinch is remarkable for cleanliness and perpetual trimming of its plumage, and very careful too are these birds in removing from their nest anything which would lessen its comfort. They have two broods in the year, and the eggs, which are four or five in number, are of a pale purplish

yellow colour, with streaks and spots of dark reddish brown, which are thicker at the larger end.

The chaffinch is a British resident, but in the more northern countries of Europe it is a migratory bird, and numbers come during winter to our land, and join the flocks of native chaffinches. They have been said by various naturalists to migrate in different companies, some flocks consisting wholly of male, and others of female birds, but this point is not yet fully ascertained.

This bird is very common in the neighbourhood of Rome, and great numbers are taken there during the month of October, with other small birds, which are a favourite article of diet with the Italians. C. L. Bonaparte, prince of Musignano, says, that the chaffinches are taken in much larger proportion than any other bird, at Paretajo and Roccolo; 500 chaffinches being, according to this writer, captured to every 80 linnets, 65 goldfinches, 30 green grosbeaks or greenfinches, &c. &c. The Italians call the bird *Franguello*, *Franguelio*, and *Spincione*. It is the *Pinson* of the old French writers; and Belon, who wrote his folio volume in 1555, mentions its powerful voice, and says that it was kept in a cage for its singing. It is now in various parts

of France called *Pinson, Pinçon, Grinson* and *Quinson*, and is the *Schild-vink* of the Germans. The ancient British, like the Germans, had a reference to its note in their name, and called it Winc. Besides the country names which have been already noticed, it is termed spink, twink, skelly, shell-apple, horse-finch, copper-finch, scobby, shilfa; and is in many villages better known by these names, than by that of chaffinch.

The walk among the yellow gorse of the heath is made delightful by the song and movements of the linnets there. As our old poet Michael Drayton sings:—

> "And now the mirthful quires with their full open throats
> Unto the joyful morn so strain their warbling notes,
> That hills and valleys ring, and even the echoing air,
> Seems all composed of songs about them everywhere."

The common Linnet* (*Linota cannabina*) is *La Linotte* of the French writers, and bears the pretty

* The Common Linnet is five inches and three quarters in length. Head and neck greyish-brown, the feathers of the crown tipped with red; back and wing-coverts chestnut; wing-quills and tail black edged with white; under parts light brown; breast bright red; beak lead colour; feet brown. In winter the red of the crown and breast disappears, and the latter is streaked with brown. *The female* also wants the red hue at all times.

Scottish names of Lintie and Lintwhite. Burns, when in despairing mood, says:—

> "In vain to me the cowslips blaw;
> In vain to me the violets spring;
> In vain to me in glen or shaw
> The mavis and the lintwhite sing."

The bird is sometimes called the greater redpole, the rose linnet, and the grey or brown linnet. The latter names differ as to the colour of the bird, and the variations of the plumage of the linnet at different seasons of the year have occupied much attention among ornithologists, and were, until fully ascertained, the cause of some confusion of species. Thus the male birds of the first year have none of the red colour on the head which is to be seen on the older birds, but the plumage is dashed with black, and the breast is very slightly tinged with red, because the feathers are reddish grey at the base and reddish white at the edge. Thus the bird, in this condition, is the grey linnet. But our grey linnet sings and thrives, and by the time he is three years old his dress is altogether changed, and he, at least during spring, merits the name of greater redpole, for the forehead is of rich crimson hue, though the remainder of the head

plumage is of reddish ash colour, with only a few black feathers at the top. The upper part of the neck is now reddish white, the plumage of the back of a fine rich brown, the throat is of yellow white, with dashes of reddish grey, the sides of the breast of rich crimson, while the greater portion of the under part of the bird is of reddish white: our bird is no longer the grey linnet.

But the autumn moulting brings a third change, and our little bird has less of crimson and more of white tints on the head and breast, till winter restores the rich colours to the plumage. In summer too, the female linnet, with her more sober brown hues, is often mistaken for the male bird, and thus arose the name of brown linnet. Birds reared in the house, never, according to Bechstein, acquire the fine red hue on the neck and breast common to the wild linnet, but remain grey like the male birds of one year old: on the other hand, older birds, which, when first brought into the house have the red plumage, lose their beautiful colours at their first moulting, and remaining grey like the young bird, are for the rest of their days grey linnets.

But *though this* bird thus loses in captivity

some of its gay tints, yet the common linnet is in as great request, as a cage bird, as the gayer goldfinch, or beautiful bullfinch; and many birdcatchers are engaged in taking the linnets. This is a sweet and gentle bird, of a very loving character, and perfectly distinguishing from all others the person who tends it. It will perch on the finger and caress it, and even seem by its looks to express affection. Like many of our small singing birds, it can well imitate the strains of others, and can even sing a song so like that of the nightingale, that many would believe it to be sung by the bird of night itself. In doing this, our linnet quite loses its own natural song, thus evincing an excellent memory, since those only in whom this faculty is retentive, will entirely abandon their own natural song for that of another bird. The Hon. Daines Barrington, who has recorded many experiments which he made with singing birds, mentions a linnet which was taken from the nest when only two or three days old, which even learned to talk. "It belonged," he says, "to Mr. Matthews, an apothecary at Kensington, and from a want of other sounds to imitate, almost articulated the words 'pretty boy,' as well as some other short

sentences. I heard the bird myself repeat the words 'pretty boy,' and Mr. Matthews assured me that he had neither the note nor call of any bird whatsoever."

How sweet is the song of the wild linnet in the early morning, while the gradually opening flowers are yet wet with dew, and the gossamer threads are among the grass, and the open downs are bright with the butterfly-like flowers of the gorse and furze. As we walk over the heath, we listen for one moment to a solitary song, but hardly have we paused to listen more fully, than a whole chorus of linnets seems to have been awakened by the strain, and sing to us both long and loud their gentle concerts. A little cloud comes over the blue sky, and the pattering rain drops drive us to the nearest tree for shelter. The loud song ceases, but scarcely has that cloud poured forth its last drops, than again the linnets twitter among the bushes, and again they are singing, as if rejoicing in the freshened air. Could we linger there till evening, those songs would still be heard, save in the almost universal silence of Nature at the summer noonday. Nor when the gorse has lost its *flowers, and* the shrub has nothing to show,

save its long dark green boughs and black seed-vessels, has the linnet sung its latest song. A gleam of sunshine from a blue sky, wakens the glad heart of the linnet in autumn, and sometimes even on a winter's day, and those sweet wild notes are again heard, though the strain is weaker and more plaintive, and seems more accordant with the melancholy tones of the wind, which are now bringing down the leaves at every gust, than with all the joyous influences which unite with the clear and brilliant song of April.

The linnet lives in great harmony and friendship with its fellows, claiming no little spot, like the robin or nightingale, as its own peculiar domain, but sharing the sun and shower, the flowers and fruits, with any winged creature that comes thither. It eats the seeds of the thistle, ragworts, and any other of the compound flowers which in autumn are so numerous; and picks the seed out of the seed-vessel of the little scarlet pimpernel, or the starry stitchwort, hunting out this food with its companions, so merrily and good-temperedly, that they form a great contrast to some companies of birds which we see contesting every seed or worm found by another, as if it had

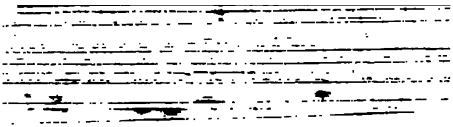
been unfairly taken from its own meal. It is probably because of the number of flax-seeds consumed by this bird, that the linnet received its names. Thus, *Linota*, *Linaria*, *La Linotte*, and our English linnet, may all have been derived from *Linum*, flax.

This bird builds among the furze or brambles, and its nest is made of mosses and grass-stalks, intermingled with wool, and lined with feathers and hairs; the eggs are of bluish white, speckled with purplish red. The parent birds show much affection for their young, the male linnet cheering his mate with a continual song, and uttering a cry so plaintive, on any apparent danger, that none but the thoughtless or hard-hearted could persist in an intrusion. Any danger to the nest and its contents, will agitate the linnet most violently. It will flit from bush to bush, then disappear; then return again, quite tremulous with emotion. Sometimes, when the birds are greatly alarmed, during the period of incubation, they will both fly from the nest, and remain absent for an hour; but never after the young are hatched will the mother bird forsake her family so long as it requires her care.

under 70°, and the sun not shining, it is sure t kill them." The wild birds which can at all time seek out the stream, probably know better a what seasons to bathe; and, at any rate, they ca fly and hop about till warmth and reaction ar procured, and can rub themselves quickly amon the leaves, and remove some of the moisture ver easily. The writer just referred to remarks, "I think the desire of washing belongs most strongl to the birds which migrate to hotter climates i winter; that of dusting to those which remai with us; a substitution wise, as all the dispensa tions of the Creator; for if the little wren i winter were to wash in cold water instead of dust ing, it must perish with the chill."

The Mountain Linnet,* or Twite (*Linota montium*), is very nearly allied to the common linnet, but is more slender in form. Its name of Twit originated in a note which it often utters, and i is called also Heather Linnet, and by the Scotch Heather Lintie. It is a common bird in moun-

* The Mountain Linnet is five inches and a quarter in length It much resembles the preceding, but is more slender, and th tail is longer. It has no red on the head or breast, but the rump is tinged with this colour in summer; the throat is tawny brown.



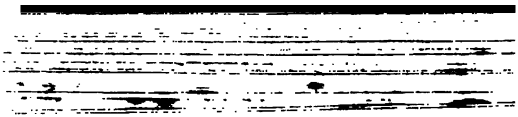
tainous districts all the year, placing its nest on the ground among the furze and heather, weaving sprigs of the heath with the dried grasses, and lining the little dwelling with wool and grass fibres. The eggs are of a light bluish green, spotted with brownish orange colour.

The song of the mountain linnet, though not so sweet as that of the common species, is very similar. The notes are very rapid, and not clear and flute-like; sudden bursts of song coming forth at intervals, so that, as Mr. Blyth has observed, it resembles the sound of several birds singing together. This naturalist adds, "I have never heard the sound, 'twite,' which it is alleged to utter; but its usual notes upon the furze much resemble those of the common linnet, being either a low 'Tsu-tsu-tsu,' or a loud 'Chat-chat.'" This bird experiences the same seasonal changes of plumage as the common linnet, and like that leaves in winter the moorlands which are its summer residence, and comes in flocks to the fields. It is very abundant in Norway and Sweden, and among the Scottish mountains, and in those which contribute to the magnificent scenery of the north of *England.*

It is in the Scottish islands, and in the northern counties of England, Scotland and Ireland, also, that we find that pretty little bird, the Lesser Redpole* (*Linota linaria*). It is widely distributed over the northern portions of Europe, and also in northern Asia, and sings its pleasant song among the dreary wilds of Kamschatka and Siberia. In some winters large numbers of these redpoles come to us from Norway and Sweden, with mountain linnets, siskins, and other birds. It is sometimes kept in a cage, when it shortly becomes familiar, and feeds out of the hand of its owner. It can also be taught a variety of little amusing performances, but it has no great powers of song, its strain consisting only of a few somewhat melodious and oft-repeated twitters. This pretty, graceful bird, seems never at rest, but clings in every attitude to the boughs, and flits gracefully about, while seeking its food among the catkins of the birch or alder, sometimes stripping for its nest the ball of the willow of its abundant down

* The Lesser Redpole is four inches and a quarter in length. Whole upper plumage dark brown with pale edges; forehead and breast crimson; throat black; under parts pale brown, streaked with darker brown on the sides; beak and feet brown. The females and young males are without the red on the breast.

LESSER REDPOLL



with so much earnestness, that its whole heart seems intent on this labour of love.

It is only, however, in the north of our island that this nest is made, and the young ones reared; and there, too, the bird loves for its dwelling the secluded wilds, far away from the homes of man, and where nothing can be heard but the song of the mountain shepherd, or the music of the stream, as it winds its way through sedges and wild flowers. Little thickets on the mountain, or hill side, where the trees and bushes are refreshed by the waters, are the retreats of the lesser redpole; and there, beneath the shelter of some thick bush, the nest is hidden. It is made of mosses and dry grasses, mixed with the plentiful willow down, and a warm lining is made also of this soft, silky material. The eggs are of a pale blue green, spotted with olive brown. Macgillivray remarks, that this bird remains all the year in many parts of Scotland. He adds, that he has seen them in August "scattered over a tract overgrown with thistles, the seeds of which they picked out precisely in the same manner as the goldfinch. On such occasions, unless they have been previously shot *at or pursued,* they take little heed of ap-

proaching danger, so that one may easily observe them. The bird is not, however, always so innocently employed as in stripping the willow catkin of its down, or the alder or thistle of its seeds, for it injures the trees by eating their young buds.

This smallest of our linnets is, like the common species, a sweet and gentle little bird. Audubon remarks of the redpoles, "It was pleasing to see several on a twig, feeding each other by passing a seed from bill to bill, one individual sometimes receiving from his two neighbours at the same time. It is sometimes called the Rose Linnet.

The Mealy Linnet (*Linota canescens*), sometimes called the Mealy Redpole, is so similar to the bird just described, that it is still a matter of dispute whether it is not of the same species. It is properly an inhabitant of the northern regions of both hemispheres. Many of these birds, however, visit our island in flocks, during the winter, and are caught by the London bird-catcher. It is a pleasing and gentle bird, but its song is weak.

Among our commonest birds may be mentioned that pretty species, the Greenfinch, or Green

GREEN FINCH.

Linnet* (*Coccothraustes chloris*), which any one may see who will walk abroad in the country during April or May. This finch is called also Green-bird, and is the *Verdier* of the French. Wordsworth has a poem addressed to it:—

"Upon yon tuft of hazel-trees,
That twinkle to the gusty breeze,
Behold him perch'd in ecstacies,
Yet seeming still to hover;
There, where the flutter of his wings
Upon his back and body flings
Shadows and summer glimmerings,
That cover him all over.

"My dazzled sight the bird deceives,
A brother of the dancing leaves;
Then flits and from the cottage-eaves
Pours forth his song in gushes;
As if by that exulting strain
He mock'd and treated with disdain
The voiceless form he chose to feign,
While sitting in the bushes."

The beautiful plumage of the green-bird is, however, almost too yellow to be mistaken for any

* The Greenfinch is six inches in length. Whole upper parts yellow-olive; wings and tail greyish-brown; the quill-feathers of both broadly marked with rich yellow; the shoulders edged with yellow; under parts yellow, brightest on the belly; beak thick, flesh-coloured; feet pale brown. The female has the general plumage dull brown, tinged with yellow-green on the rump and belly.

leaf save one of the autumnal bough. Poets and naturalists will love this finch for its association with woodland trees and flowers, with the hawthorn hedge, or the bough of the shrubbery; but it has no great powers of melody, and its song, though somewhat sweet, is weak. It may also be taught to repeat words, and surpasses even the bullfinch in its docility. Bechstein says that it may not only be accustomed to go and return again, but also to build in a room near an orchard, or in a summer-house in a garden.

The greenfinch is a resident bird, and is not only generally diffused over Britain, but also over the greater portion of Europe. It builds in April, placing its nest in a bush, or in the very thickest part of the hedge. This is formed of moss and wool, lined with feathers or hairs. The eggs are of a bluish white, speckled with pale orange-brown. This bird is sometimes called the green grosbeak. Its beak is indeed very large, and is flesh-coloured.

In winter a number of greenfinches assemble in farm-yards with the buntings and other small birds, and flit and hop about in search of grain. But it is only in the daytime that they thus congregate

with other species, as at night they quit the other birds and betake themselves to the holly, or fir, or other evergreens, when, after flying awhile around the tree, they roost for the night.

A less generally known bird is the Hawfinch* (*Coccothraustes vulgaris*). It has a remarkably strong, conical bill, very thick at the base, and admirably adapted for breaking the stones of fruits and extracting the kernel, or for opening the beech-nuts, of which it is very fond. Though unfrequent in some parts of Britain, yet in others, as in Epping Forest, it is numerous; and it is a common bird in Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Russia. In some places it remains all the year, and well deserves to be enumerated among our wild songsters, though, from its shy and secluded habits, its song is not so generally known as that of most of our singing-birds. Mr. Selby remarks of the hawfinch, that it probably utters

* The Hawfinch is seven inches in length. Upper parts chestnut, paling to fawn colour on the head and neck; wings black, crossed by a broad band of white; tail black, tipped with white; the space between the eye and the beak, the chin and throat, deep black; under parts pale brown; beak blue; feet light brown. The wing-quills from the fifth to the ninth have their tips singularly notched on one vane, and curved over on the other.

a superior song. Bechstein considers that its song is not very agreeable, consisting only of a low whistling, mixed with some harsh tones. He adds, however, that the tameness of this bird in captivity may give pleasure; for timid as it is when wild, it then acquires confidence, and will even defend itself very courageously, by means of its strong beak, from dogs and cats. Mrs. Montagu heard it some mild days in winter, singing some sweet, though low, plaintive notes; and several other naturalists describe its song as sweet, though little varied.

As we might suppose from its familiar name, our bird feeds on the hawthorn berries. It also eats the fruits of the ash, maple, elm, laurel, holly, juniper, hornbeam, and service-trees; and though it may care little for the plum or cherry, yet it values their kernels.

It usually builds in low, bushy trees, as the hawthorn or holly; but sometimes it chooses a high branch of some tall pine or fir. Instances are known of its building, in two seasons following, on the bough of the same tree, as if those memories of past enjoyment, and those local associations so common to man, were no less shared by the bird.

Its nest is not a very compact structure, and is remarkably shallow. It is made of twigs and fibres, always intermingled, more or less, with the grey lichens, which add so much to the beauty of a nest. The eggs are from four to six in number, of a greenish white, streaked with brown and grey.

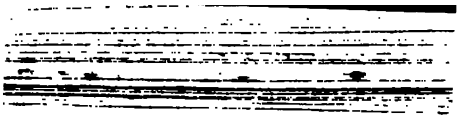
There seems little temptation to make a captive of a bird whose song is very inferior to many, nor is the hawfinch much prized as a cage-bird in this country. In France, however, it is frequently thus kept. When in confinement it is necessary that it should be kept apart from other birds, for it will kill a weaker companion by pinching out its flesh with its strong talons, making all the while an angry noise, which is like that made by a file.

So extremely shy is the bird when wild, that an ornithologist remarks of it,—"In this trait it exceeds any land bird with which I am acquainted; and in open places it is almost impossible to approach it within gun-shot." When it hears the sound of a footstep, it flies off immediately to the very top of the tallest tree, and mingling there with the foliage, soon becomes invisible. In the summer months it makes much havoc amongst trees in

the gardens in the neighbourhood of Epping Forest.

One of the earliest building birds is the Crossbill* (*Loxia curvirostra*), which, as early even as January, and commonly during the two following months, is busy in this work of love and duty. It seems occasionally to build in England, and sometimes rears its young among the pine plantations of Scotland, or more frequently still in Ireland. Flocks of these remarkable birds come to our shores from northern countries, at various seasons, and at irregular periods. Sometimes they are seen at Midsummer, but more commonly in autumn. During the latter end of the month of June, 1835, a flight of these birds was observed about the plantations of Saffron Walden and the neighbouring villages, and described by a naturalist there. He remarks, that in the early part of their visit, most of them were in a suit of plain, greenish, sober grey, some very dusky, so as to look very dark, almost black; and he mentions one

* The Crossbill is seven inches in length. The plumage varies much with sex and age: sometimes almost wholly scarlet; at others yellowish-olive; sometimes a mottling of these colours, or a combination of them into an orange, more or less bright. The wings and tail are dark brown.



which was shot in the June of the following year, which was so dingy as almost to warrant the conclusion that it had chosen a chimney for its sleeping-place. The plumage, however, was continually changing; some getting more green, or of brighter red or orange; and when in their full feathers, the birds became of rich crimson.

Nothing can be more amusing than to watch the crossbills when they first come to our plantations. They keep up a perpetual twittering, as if they were all in conversation together, where all were talkers and no listeners. They are far more active than parrots; but they remind one perpetually of these birds, as with their strong feet they cling to the branches, and swing themselves into the most curious and picturesque attitudes. Sometimes they hang horizontally, now they are perfectly upright or flitting from bough to bough, swinging their bodies to and fro the moment they alight.

Their beak is most curiously formed; for the mandibles cross each other, sometimes from left to right, and sometimes from right to left. Buffon accounted this singular bill a deformity; but it is admirably adapted to the wants of the bird, and is a most beautiful instrument for the purposes it has

to accomplish. Holding the fir-cone with one foot, and with the firm, sharp beak, extracting the kernels, the crossbill makes a loud, snapping noise, while throwing the empty cones to the ground, one after another, as its appetite is being satisfied. This beak becomes somewhat worn by long use; but as it grows continually, it is renewed.

The young crossbills, while in their nest, have the mandibles of equal size, as their crossing would prevent the nestlings from receiving so well the food brought them by their parents. Their strong beaks are sometimes very destructive to cages in which they are confined; and Mr. Yarrell quotes a passage from Mr. Townsend, on some of the little mischievous tricks of these beautiful birds. "My pets," says this gentleman, "would often come to my table while I was writing, and carry off my pencils, little chip boxes in which I occasionally kept insects, and other similar objects, and tear them to pieces in a minute. Their mode of operation is by first pecking a little hole; in this they insert their bill, and then split and tear the object by the lateral force. When I treated them, as I often did, with almonds in their shells, they got at the kernels in the same manner; first,

pecking a hole in the shell, and then enlarging it by wrenching off pieces by the lateral power." These birds feed very voraciously, and in captivity are remarkably tame, not caring for the presence of strangers, but perpetually cheerful, and fluttering and jumping about in the most lively manner; sleeping in what would seem to us the most uncomfortable position, by holding themselves with their claws to the side of the cage.

In the wild state the crossbills are the most unsuspicious of birds; and until painful experience has taught them the meaning of the sound of the gun, they evince no terror at it. When they first come to our plantations, they will hear the report quite near them, and continue eating the fir-seeds, as if secure from danger; and even when footsteps are approaching, will cling, in happy confidence, to the bough, looking brightly and cheerfully at the comer; and on the first arrival, will, when fatigued, suffer themselves to be taken by the hand, unresistingly. Even when some alarm has been caused by the death of a companion by the gun, the other birds will only retreat a little farther into the green boughs, and one of their number will, from the topmost branch, act like a sentinel, and give timely warning of danger.

The woodcutters of Thuringia have a great respect for the crossbills and their nests, on account of a superstition which they have respecting them. The birds, when in captivity, are subject to several diseases, such as swelling of the feet, and weakness of the eyes. The mountaineer of Thuringia believes that these poor, hapless birds will take to themselves diseases which else would fall upon himself or family, and therefore keeps them in cages to avert calamity. He feels persuaded that a bird which has an upper mandible turning to the right, will take the rheumatism or cold from himself; while he is well assured that if it turns to the left, his wife or daughter will escape these evils, and they will become the lot of the bird. Like many caged birds, the crossbill, too, suffers from epilepsy; and the Thuringian drinks, in all good faith, the water left in the morning in the little vase of the bird-cage, believing it to be a certain means of preventing that disease.

The crossbill is a native of the northern countries of Europe and Asia. It builds a nest of fine small twigs and coarse moss, lining it with softer moss. Its eggs are of greyish white, spotted and dashed with red. Its song is described as consisting of a few sharp strains.

In the course of April and May, we may hear in our woodlands or gardens or shrubberies, the low piping notes of the Bullfinch* (*Pyrrhula vulgaris*). The song is not a very melodious one, neither can it be heard at any great distance; yet the bird must have a musical ear, and a good memory. No bird has so great a facility as this for learning music, and it can be taught to whistle to the tunes of a German flute, and will often add to them a few little graces from its natural song. Some bullfinches can be trained to sing two or three different airs, never at all mingling one with the other; but much skill and patience are requisite in thus educating it. A bird so accomplished is very expensive, and as much as four or five pounds is sometimes given for a well-trained bullfinch. At Hesse and Fulda, little schools are formed for the purpose of teaching the birds, and these supply Germany, Holland, and England, with these mu-

* The Bullfinch is about six inches in length. Crown of the head deep black; neck, shoulders, and back bluish-grey; rump white; wings and tail black, the former crossed by a broad band of white; beak, face, and chin black; sides of the neck, throat, breast, and belly brick-red; lower parts white; feet purplish-brown. The colours of the female are as usual less pure and distinct.

sicians. "No school," says Dr. Stanley, "can be more diligently attended by its master, and no scholars more effectually trained to their own calling, than a seminary of bullfinches. As a general rule, they are formed into classes of about six each, and kept in a dark room, when food and music are administered at the same time; so that when the meal is ended, if the birds feel disposed to tune up, they are naturally inclined to copy the sounds which are so familiar to them. As soon as they begin to imitate a few notes, the light is admitted into the room, which still further exhilarates their spirits, and inclines them to sing." In some of these schools the birds are not allowed either light or food till they begin to sing. After being thus taught in classes, each bullfinch is made the sole charge of a boy, who plays his organ from morning till night, while the superintendent of the bird school goes his rounds, regularly, to watch the progress of teacher and pupils. It seems singular to those unused to birds, to find that the bullfinches fully understand the scoldings or praises which they receive from this class-master, and which are distributed according to their deserts. This training process is continued for nine months,

by which time the bird has become so accustomed to the airs which it has to perform, as to sing them without mistake. Sometimes during the moulting season, however, the poor little songster's memory fails, and all the trouble bestowed on its education becomes perfectly useless. Some birds are taught by these methods to whistle three distinct airs, but there are few which can do more than execute a simple air, with perhaps some few notes as a prelude.

But besides these acquired songs, the bullfinch has many winning ways in captivity, and seems well to comprehend the wishes of its possessor. The writer once was accustomed to see a bullfinch, which would usually sing at the bidding of its mistress, unless strangers were in the room, when it would persist in silence. Sometimes, after a great deal of coaxing the bird would begin; but it seemed to have a mischievous pleasure in making the audience wait; and would, after uttering the prelude, again relapse into silence. When in very obstinate moods, it would require from its mistress some further inducement than mere caresses and persuasions before commencing; but on her fetching some *little* branch of a tree, or even a straw,

or piece of thread, the bird would whistle its air sweetly and loudly, then pause and peck the hand of its mistress as if to claim its reward. Buffon says that tame bullfinches which have escaped from the aviary, and lived for a year at liberty in the woods, have been known to return to the mistress who had petted them, and never again to leave her; while others, when forced to leave their master, have pined and died of grief. A bullfinch, too, which was much attached to its owner was subject to frightful dreams, under the influence of which it would fall from its perch, and dash itself against its cage. But no sooner did it hear the soothing tones which its master would address to it, than it returned to its perch and to its sleep in confidence and happiness. Bechstein says that a bullfinch may be trusted to go awhile to the woods, and come back again; and that, especially if its mate be left behind, the affectionate bird will assuredly return. If unkindly treated, or roughly handled, it will die suddenly, or fall into fits. Sir William Parsons records a most remarkable instance of its attachment. He had one of these birds which he had taught to whistle "God save the King." He went abroad, leaving this bird

in the care of his sister, and on his return, was told that his bullfinch was very ill. With feelings of sorrow, Sir William went up to the cage, opened the door, put in his hand, addressed the bird in the usual endearing manner, when it opened its eyes feebly, shook its feathers, by a great effort reached the outstretched finger of its master, feebly piped "God save the King," and expired.

The bullfinch is no favourite with the gardeners, for it destroys many early buds of our fruit-trees, stripping the apples, pears, plums, gooseberries, and cherries of the gardens; and then going away to the sloe bushes, and doing sad havoc in the hedges. Its strong bill also enables it to get at the seeds which lie in the cones of the fir, and in the beech mast, and it eats corn, flax seed, and the seeds of the nettles. It cannot be pleaded in behalf of this, as of some other birds, that it selects for its food such buds as have a worm enclosed within their folds; for it is the bud itself which is the delight of the bullfinch, and thus in winter and early spring it is sadly destructive to fruit lands. A writer in the Magazine of Natural History says—"Witnessing, a few springs since, the havoc made by a number of bullfinches on two thriving

young codlin-trees, that for several years had blossomed and borne profusely, and had, at that time, every appearance of health, my curiosity was excited on this subject, and I then saw opened the crops of two of these depredators. They were wholly filled with the vegetable matter on which the birds had been feeding, and which did not appear to contain insects of any kind. Since that time the codlin-trees have never grown with so much vigour as they did previously, many branches being so entirely stripped of buds that they never recovered. This spring the trial was repeated, and when the trees were in a more advanced state, in fact, just as the leaves were beginning to expand, and the blossom-buds to make their appearance, a culprit bullfinch was killed in the very act, an unswallowed morsel yet remaining in his bill, to bear witness against him. This was a single flower-bud, with all its parts yet entire; but those buds with which its crop, the passage thence to the gizzard, and the gizzard itself, were completely filled, appeared to consist only of the future fruit with the stamens and pistils attached to it, but stripped of calyx and petals and of its internal covering. The anthers, large in comparison with

the rest, and nearly as large as they would have been had the flower been suffered to open, were even in that state curiously and beautifully apparent; and on a careful examination beneath a microscope, no vestige of anything like disease or insects could be discovered. Beneath the trees themselves, the ground was thickly strewed with the parts of the flowers rejected by these nice and accurate dissectors, which parts invariably consisted of the calyx and petals yet remaining attached together. It appears to me that the buds are destroyed for the sake of the interior parts of the fruit and flowers, by these enemies to trees of the Prunus and Pyrus kinds; as cowslips and primroses are by the other birds, for the purpose of devouring their minute and yet imperfect seeds." A pair of bullfinches have been known also to strip a considerable sized plum-tree of every bud in the course of two days. Bishop Mant notices its feeding on the fruits.

"Deep in the thorns' entangled maze,
Or where the fruit-trees' thickening sprays
Yield a secure and close retreat,
The dusky bullfinch plans her seat.
There, where you see the cluster'd boughs
Put forth the opening bud, her spouse

With mantle grey and jet-like head,
And flaming breast of crimson red,
Is perch'd with hard and hawk-like beak,
Intent the embryo food to seek;
Nor ceases from his pleasing toil
The orchard's budding hope to spoil.
Unless with quick and timid glance
Of his dark eye your dread advance
He notice, and your search evade,
Hid in the thicket's pathless shade."

The shyness of the bullfinch renders it little seen, and it would often escape notice, but for the soft plaintive whistle with which it calls its companions, or the low short twitter which it makes while feeding. Yet it is a common bird in the wooded districts of our land, coming also into orchards and gardens. It is a widely spread species, and frequent in most of the northern countries of Europe, only occurring in Southern Europe as a bird of passage. It is especially common in the mountainous forests of Germany. With us it resides all the year.

The male and female bullfinches generally keep together during winter, and may be seen at no great distance from each other, helping themselves from the budding trees. Their motions are somewhat less rapid than those of most of our small

birds. The nest is usually built in May, and is a shallow structure, formed of small twigs, lined with a few root fibres, and containing about four slate-coloured eggs, spotted with purplish or pale orange brown at the larger ends. Two broods are reared in the year, and the nest is placed in the sloe, hawthorn, or other low tree or bush. Sometimes the gooseberry is chosen, and occasionally the bullfinch builds among the roses and their green sprays.

This bird is also called Pope, Coal-hood, Tony-hoop, Alp, Nope, or Monk; and is the *Bouvreuil commun* of the French, and the *Blutfink* of the Germans.

CHAPTER X.

THE SWALLOW TRIBE.

EVERY one who at all observes the mere external aspects of nature, the changing seasons, the budding trees and the opening flowers, has become acquainted with the Swallow. We all look with pleasure on the first swallow, which in April skims through the air before us: and though, as the proverb common to most European nations expresses it, "One swallow does not make a summer," yet is even the stray bird an indication of coming multitudes, and of all beauties and delights associated with that rich season. Even the inhabitant of the city, far from the wild flowers and green boughs which he loves so well, watches for the coming of the first swallow, and thinks of the lanes and meadows among which the pearly white-thorn is beginning to bud, and where the violet,

and primrose, and anemone, and bluebell peep through the hedges; and where the cottage chimney, which the swallows have long haunted, rises above the garden plots, gay with polyanthuses and daffodils, and sweet-scented wallflowers. And when, a few days after, when even the last bleak wind of winter has ceased to stir the woods, and the birds, rejoicing in sweet vernal showers, come in great numbers, we hail them with delight, and wonder not that the prophet Jeremiah, while lamenting the faithlessness of God's chosen people, should remind them of the constancy of the migratory birds, and say: "The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed time, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming." We wonder not that the people of Greece, ever loving the sunshine, ever alive to the genial influences of nature, held a festival at their arrival; and that children went about the cities and villages in procession, receiving presents at every door, and stopping to chaunt, to the sound of musical instruments, a welcome to the swallow. Well might Sir Humphrey Davy call this bird the joyous prophet of the year, the harbinger of the best season, leaving the green

meadows of England in autumn, for the myrtle and olive groves of Italy, or for the tall palms of Africa, and coming to us as it does early in April.

Nor is it alone because of its association with spring, that we value the swallow tribe. At all times the habits of these birds are interesting, their motions and actions elegant. Skimming the air in most graceful evolutions, continually crossing each other's path,—yet never striking one against another; wheeling on high without any confusion, and on untiring wing, they are, though of sober plumage, the most beautiful of birds. Now they descend and skim lightly a little way above the grass, or over the city's pavement, and we say that rain is coming. Do the swallows come from their height to tell us this? Nay, but the air is already humid and chill, and the nice perceptions of the insect tribe have discovered it, though as yet we feel it not, and their slight wings refuse to carry them high in air, and the swallow knowing this too, by his sensations, or by that great power of sight which can alone conduct him safely with rapidity, comes down to hunt for his insect-prey.

Many birds are very conscious of approaching

atmospheric changes, and may well be relied on as giving indications of these in various ways. Nor is it the bird alone, which is thus influenced. All animals, which living entirely in the air are exposed to its variations, are far more cognisant of these changes than we are. Thus the frogs croak in the pool, and the cattle run wildly over the meadow, and eat with unusual voracity their meal from the grass; the ants bring back the chrysalides to their nest; the earthworm comes up to the surface, to respire the welcome moisture; and the very fishes in the pool seem to know that rain is coming, and arise up to the surface. Yet the shepherd cannot feel these changes, though he may observe their prognostics, and see how the leaves of the clover field are standing upright, and the scarlet pimpernel is folding its petals, and hear more clearly the usual sound of some distant sheep-bell, or of some trickling waterfall, as it comes down the slope of the hill.

We have four species of the Swallow tribe. The Common Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), the Martin (*Hirundo urbica*), the Sand Martin (*Hirundo riparia*), and the Swift (*Cypselus apus*), all alike, in many of their habits, and all coming

with the spring, and leaving us in autumn for warmer lands. The Swift is, as Bishop Mant has described it, the latest in arriving. Writing on the month of April, he says:—

> "The threefold tribe of swallows haste
> In thy first days, or ere to waste
> Thy midmost course has run. Nor fails
> He of the pinion's broadest sails
> To track their path, their brother Swift
> More late to come,
> More prompt to quit his summer home
> Is he of all the fork-tail'd race,
> As if his wintry dwelling-place,
> Hard by the stormy Cape, or far
> In regions of the Eastern star,
> Forbade across the tedious way,
> Or quick approach, or lengthen'd stay."

The value to man of the services performed by insectivorous birds, has been mentioned on an earlier page, and to no birds do we owe more gratitude for these uses, than to the swallow tribe. The rapid flight, the determined vigour with which these birds pursue the winged insects, render them the most successful destroyers of a race which else would injure our crops, our gardens, our orchards, our green fields, and that, if left untouched for the summer's day, would, in the night, eat vege-

tation which a month's growth would not repair. The swallow never touches our fruits, nor asks one grain of the ripening corn, or the store of the granary. "The immense quantity of flies," says the author of the Journal of a Naturalist, "which are destroyed in a short space of time by one individual bird, is scarcely to be credited by those who have not had actual experience of the facts. I was once present when a swift was shot,—I may as well confess the truth—I was myself (then a thoughtless youth) the perpetrator of the deed: I acknowledge the fault in contrition, and will never be guilty of the like again. It was in the breeding season, when the young were hatched; at which time the parent birds, as is well known, are in the habit of making little excursions into the country, to a considerable distance from their breeding places, for the purpose of collecting flies, which they bring home to their infant progeny. On picking up my hapless and ill-gotten prey, I observed a number of flies, some mutilated, others scarcely injured, crawling out of the bird's mouth; the throat and pouch seemed absolutely stuffed with them, and an incredible number was at length *disgorged*. I am sure I speak within

compass, when I state, that there was a mass of flies, just caught by this single swift, larger than, when pressed close, could conveniently be contained in the bowl of an ordinary table-spoon!" It would be difficult to say why a marksman could find pleasure in shooting a swallow. Its flesh cannot be eaten, its plumage is useless, and so innocent and useful are its habits, that if we had no love for elegance and grace, and no feelings of humanity for the fowls of the air, it should be spared on the score of its utility. But those who shoot these, or other birds, in the spring, forget the sufferings which await the nestlings deprived of their parents; for these must die slowly of cold and hunger: they forget that the Great Father of us all cared for the animal race, when He gave them to us that we should have dominion over them. Not only have the inferior creatures been so made as that their very existence is an enjoyment to themselves, but the Law given to Moses enjoins, in various places, kindness and consideration both to the bird and the beast.

The swallow tribe take their prey on the wing, and are ever delighting our eye as they do so, though two only of the tribe have any powers of

song. Of the common Swallow,* White, of Selborne, remarks: "He is a delicate songster, and in soft sunny weather sings both perching and flying; on trees, in a kind of concert, or on chimney-tops;" and though he who would make sure of hearing the swallow had need be an early riser, yet the low soft warble may be heard too of an evening, as Richard Howitt says:

"We heard amid the day-break
Thy twitter blithe and sweet;
In life's auspicious morning,
The precious and the fleet:
We saw thee lightly skimming
O'er fields of summer flowers,
And heard thy song of inward bliss
Through evening's golden hours."

Nor is it uninteresting to mark the busy swallows in October, when they are preparing to migrate. For many days they may be seen, gradually gathering in greater numbers, sometimes in some tall trees, at others thickening over the walls, or

* The Swallow is eight inches in length, of which the outer tail-feathers measure five. Whole upper parts steel-blue; wings and tail black; all the tail-feathers, except the middle pair, marked with white on their inner webs; forehead, chin, and throat chestnut, bounded below by a band of blue; under parts buff-white; *beak and feet* black.

on roofs of houses. How long it takes to get th assembly together; and, if we may infer anythin from the perpetual noise, how many consultation seem necessary as to their mode of travelling, o their future prospect! At length the clamou ceases, and we look out on some morning to fin that the swallows are all gone, perhaps to the eas or west, to await the coming of some which ma yet be lingering from carelessness or infirmity; bu at length they are all gone away to the sunny south and though some may remain on the southern shore of Spain, yet Africa is their grand winter dwelling place. They have been often seen, both in autum and in spring, crossing the Mediterranean, some times taking a short rest on the rigging of the ships and even resting there a day or two to recove strength. Now and then they drop into the sea and go on again, refreshed by their salt-wate bath. But so strong is the desire at this seaso to go to warmer regions, that the bird surmount all obstacles, and even forgets its young. Instance have been known in which the second brood wa hatched so late in the season, that the swallows whose care for their young is usually most in cessant and affectionate, have gone and left thei

nestlings to perish. Dr. Jenner observed a pair of martins which thus forsook their unfledged young, and returning in the following May to their old nest, had first to remove from their dwelling the skeletons of the hapless little birds. Strong indeed must be the mysterious impulse of migration, when it can overcome the powerful and better understood principle of the love of its young.

Who that has long watched birds can doubt of their mutual comprehension of that singular language which seems to our ears but a confusion of sounds. Any one who pays attention to the habits of young nestling birds, can perceive that the parent well understands the clamorous appeal of its little ones; and among some birds, as the swallow, the mother bird while in the nest seems continually chirping, as if holding a conversation with her family, the young evidently being as familiar with the notes of their parents, as the latter know the voice of their children. The birds which at early dawn twitter perpetually, or assemble in the trees and twitter and chirp all day long among the boughs, have a meaning in these utterances, which though not definitely understood by us, *yet convey* even to our ears tones either of

pleasure or displeasure. The song, if it tells of love and its desire to please, is yet still more evident of the bird's own happiness, and is perhaps more dependent on his spirits and health than on any other cause. The exultation of the hen, whose loud cackle resounds far and wide, cannot be mistaken; and no one can have watched an assemblage of sparrows, without being conscious of the quarrelling and scolding voices which are evidently addressed to some one among the number, which has offended them. So attractive to all its own species is the call-note common to each individual, that the birdcatcher uses it to decoy others to his nets, and no fear of danger will prevent numbers from assembling on a spot, where, but for this, they would have escaped the snare. So marked is this effect that the Hon. Daines Barrington observes, that if one half of a flock of birds is taken, the other half will alight on the nets and be taken too.

Whether the call-note of one species is regarded by another seems doubtful, but a loud note of danger, which gives warning of a bird of prey, or the approach of a cat, is evidently understood by the whole community of small birds. Let but the

far-seeing eye of one swallow discover the owl in the air above him, and a piercing shriek will be uttered, which will call up not only all the swallows and martins about him, but will, as Mr. Knapp observes, be instantly understood by every finch and sparrow, and its warning attended to. "The instant," says this writer, "the signal of danger is uttered, we hear the whole flock, though composed of various species, repeat a separate moan, and away they all scuttle into the bushes for safety."

But the habit of thus seeking shelter is not invariable, for in some cases, when the swallow shrieks its alarm, the whole tribe of swallows and other small birds rush boldly to the scene of danger, and they will sometimes with wing and beak attack their formidable foe till some individual among them falls a victim to its courage, and serves as a warning to the others to quit the unequal combat.

Although no other birds make quite so loud a chattering as the swallow before migrating, yet something similar is heard among other tribes when preparing for their autumnal voyage. The causes of migration are involved in mystery, though the want of proper food and a presentiment of coming cold, are probably the chief inducements. The

remarks of M. Brehm, on the manner in which it i undertaken, are interesting. "Every bird" h says, "has its native country, where it freely re produces and remains part of the year, travelling the remainder. Most birds spend half the yea at their home, and the other half in travelling Some, particularly birds of prey, travel by day but by far the greater part travel by night, an some perform their migration indifferently eithe by day or night. They seem to pass the whole o their migration without sleep, for they employ th day in seeking their food, stopping in the place where they are most likely to find it. They commonly keep very high in the air, and always a nearly the same distance from the earth, so that they rise very high over mountains, and fly lowe among valleys."

The flight of birds generally has been estimated at from fifty to a hundred-and-twenty miles an hour, but supposing a swallow to fly at the rate of ninety miles an hour, it would in little more than thirteen hours reach Egypt. The old notion that the swallows plunged under water and remained there during winter, is now quite exploded, yet it was long believed by good naturalists.

Proofs to the contrary have been obtained, not only by the testimony of those who have seen them while crossing the ocean, but by various experiments made upon the birds. Some of these, especially those made by Spallanzani, are so cruel, that we feel that knowledge has been purchased at too great a price. The 10th of April seems to be established as the average time of their return to our island, but this may be rather earlier or later in the season, according to the weather. As Mr. Broderip has observed, "the songsters which visit us in the season of love, hope, and joy, have very retentive memories," for the same pair of birds will return to their old homes. A silken thread attached to the leg of a swallow in the spring, has served to prove that year after year the birds sought their earliest dwelling, and probably came back to it all their lives. So fond are they even of their old neighbourhood, that if the nest is destroyed they will build again in the very spot.

The swallow seems to prefer the dwellings of man as the place in which to build its nest, and often selects such as are near water. In such places, *insects* are most numerous; and here,

too, it may find the portions of moist clay which are brought from the borders of the stream, or sometimes from the puddles in the street, or road, and which, moulded into small pellets, are mixed with straw and bents for the framework of its dwelling. This is saucer-shaped in form, and is lined with feathers. The process of making the nest is gradual, one layer only being laid on at a time, and then left for hours to dry, before the work progresses. The name of chimney swallow, applied to our common species in several European countries, indicates the spots most frequently chosen; and the bird, taking possession in May or June of some sleeping room or other unused chimney, makes its nest in any nook or angle which it can find. Sometimes an old wall offers a hole in which the nest can be placed, sheltered from the elements, and sometimes an empty room presents a temptation too great to be resisted; while the roof of an open barn or shed occasionally forms a covering, or it is built among the rafters of some outhouse, where the thatch is a protection from rain and wind.

That the swallow is often a capricious architect, might be proved by various anecdotes recorded by

ornithologists. White of Selborne mentions a pair which built for two years together on the handle of a pair of garden shears, which were hung up against the boards of an outhouse, where the bird must have had its nest disturbed whenever that implement was wanted; while another built on the wings of the body of an owl which happened to hang dead from the rafter of a barn. "In the summer of 1830," says a writer in Loudon's Magazine of Natural History, "a pair of swallows commenced their nest upon the crank of a bell-wire in the passage of a farm-house at Crux Easton; the one end of which opened into a little garden, the other into the kitchen, and the door of which towards the garden was usually left open. The passage was fifteen or eighteen feet in length, and the bell-wire nearly at the extremity, towards the kitchen. The farmer and his wife were so much pleased with the sociability and confidence of their new inmates, that they not only allowed their new domicile to remain unmolested, but were particularly careful that free ingress and egress should be always afforded through the garden door. The nest was completed, and a brood of young swallows reared, which took wing.

In the autumn of the same year, the farmer, returning from shooting, with his gun loaded, thoughtlessly discharged it at a swallow, which he killed. The circumstance passed without comment, until the summer of the following year, when from the absence of his old favourites it occurred to him that the poor bird so wantonly killed must have been one of the pair.

In the summer of 1832, a pair of birds, the offspring, probably, of the former occupants reared in the passage, were again observed frequenting their old haunt. They first attempted to fix their nest against a cupboard door, immediately over the door leading into the kitchen; and the farmer's wife, fearing it might be shaken down, from the closing or opening of the door, (for it was partly open when the nest was begun,) drove a nail beneath to secure it in its position. However, the swallows did not approve of this interference; they forsook their nest, and commenced a second over the kitchen door; but this they could not secure. The thought now struck the farmer, that if the nest of 1830, which still remained on the bell-wire, were removed, the birds would adopt their old situation. This was accord-

ingly done. The pair immediately profited by the farmer's suggestion; a nest was completed, and an egg deposited in the short space of four days from the commencement of the new work. While the business of incubation was going forward, the farmer's sheep-shearing was accomplished, and the usual supper given to the labourers in the kitchen; but notwithstanding the confusion and smoke, the constant opening and closing the door, the parent bird never moved from her nest. The hay-making feast arrived, when the young birds were hatched; and, again, amid the noise and confusion, the old swallows unremittingly waited upon their offspring. The nestlings took flight; but until the period arrived for migration, they constantly returned to the passage for the night. At the beginning of the evening, they perched on the edge of the nest; and, as the night came on, as if for additional warmth, they sunk down into its interior. As the season advanced, and they became full-feathered, they deserted the nest altogether, and roosted on the bell-wire. Here they perched during the conviviality of the harvest supper, perfectly regardless of the uproar; and here I saw them perched [illegible] their night's

repose, when visiting Crux Easton on an evening in the middle of September."

It is not only while they remain in the nest, that young swallows are constant objects of the solicitude of their parents. Much pains is taken in teaching them to fly, and to capture their insect prey. For several days successively the young birds are conducted up the shaft of the chimney to its summit, and there they sit, surveying the world around them, while their parents procure and bring them food. Their next step in progress, is to take a short flight to some leafless bough of a tree, and sitting there in rows, they receive their meal from the older birds. Soon, however, they learn to trust their strong wings, and to wheel about in those graceful circles common to the tribe. Even now, however, they cannot always secure the insects, but the parent swallows dash into the winged circles, and bring away the flies, or gnats, and convey them to the mouths of their young charge.

The Martin* (*Hirundo urbica*), which comes to

* The Martin is about five inches and a quarter in length. Upper parts glossy blue-black; rump, chin, and whole under *parts* pure white; [illegible] black; feet clothed with grey down.

SWIFTS.

SAND MARTIN.

us a few days after the swallow, has, also, a low guttural and pleasing song. Trusting its nest, with all its precious charge, immediately under our very eaves, and in the corners of our windows, we may often hear the gentle notes of the bird, and watch the process by which the mud chamber is gradually shaped into a comfortable and sheltered dwelling-place, destined, probably, for rearing a great number of young martins in the course of successive summers.

The Sand Martin* (*Hirundo riparia*), demands but a short notice, for it cannot be said to sing, though it utters some low notes which are rather sweet. It has an ingenious mode of making itself and its family very comfortable, and dwells with many others of its species in little colonies, all of them helping to mine their way into cliffs and sandbanks, and placing the nest in these excavations. The sharp, hard bill seems admirably adapted for a mining instrument, and our bird uses it skilfully, as he hangs on with his strong claws, gradually rounding the aperture, till it is

* The Sand Martin is four inches and three-quarters in length. Upper parts dark brown; under parts white; a band of brown crosses the breast; beak and feet dark brown.

exactly suited for the nest; working on from the circumference and yet shaping it as well as if he had mathematical instruments to guide his progress. This hollow burrow reaches horizontally to a depth of about two feet, and at the very extremity is placed the nest of grass, made cosy and snug by a warm lining of feathers. The eggs, like those of the house martin, are white.

Every one knows that wonderful bird the Swift* (*Cypselus apus*), but, alas! he is no singer; only uttering a loud scream as he darts past us. Hence in rural districts he is named "squeaker." He is, indeed, the bird of the air, for he never alights on the ground; for so long are his wings, and so short his feet,† that he finds it impossible to rise from an even surface, and cannot walk, but only crawl over the earth. But his feet are not intended for walking, but for clinging; and the bird well knows how to use them for this purpose, and hangs by sharp-hooked claws to the perpendicular face of walls and houses. Well is this

* The Swift is seven inches in length. Whole plumage brownish-black, except a small patch of dull white on the chin; beak and feet black.

† The specific name of this bird, apus, means "footless."

bird call the swift, for the eye can hardly follow his rapid motion. In Palestine it is termed Hadji, or Pilgrim, and being the largest and the most conspicuous of the swallow tribe in that land, it is the type of the heraldic martlet, originally applied in the science of blazon, as the especial distinction of a pilgrim crusader, which was, doubtless, borrowed from Oriental nations. This is probably the bird alluded to by the Psalmist, when longing for the communion of worship in the sanctuary of Israel, he exclaimed, "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God."

The swift lives on the wing; eats, drinks, and collects materials for its nest on the wing, never resting except during darkness, and when the family duties demand a patient sitting. Its nest is made in holes in steeples, or under the eaves of the old house, or church, or turret, and two eggs, white as ivory, are deposited in it. In France the bird is termed *Martinet de Muraille*, and in Paris and some other places, it is called *Le Juif*.

Our jet-black bird seems to pass a busy life

here, and directly he arrives may be seen preparing for the nest. All the time of his short stay he is incessantly occupied in catching his prey, and after rushing distractedly through the air for about fourteen or fifteen weeks, goes off again to other climates.

The usual time of the arrival of this bird is early in May, and by the middle of August it is gone; though now and then some straggler is left a little longer. The swallows are all widely distributed, being found, apparently like the insect tribe on which they feed, in almost every part of the world.

THE END.

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